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IN A BLINK OF AN EYE

Unpublished work © 2001 Yehudith Kleinman

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The little girl pulls me back.

"What do you want from me, little one? Do you want to go back to change the choice?! But you know what the outcome will be... Maybe you want to go back to look for Mamma? But there is no point in it, child. The witnesses are all gone, and there, in the bright room, not even a drop of blood was shed".

- "I know that. I want you to take me back, for I want to know what happened to Angelica!"

The terrible drama is about to happen and there is no escape.

"Okay, Little one. Give me your hand, we are about to enter the tunnel to go back in time. Close your eyes and hold on tight!

You can open your eyes now. We have arrived. We are in Milan, at the beginning of 1944"...

The Christian neighbor told me that she is poor and can't take care of me, but she will bring me to a convent where they will take very good care of me.

She brought me into a big building, where there were lots of big and small girls, all dressed in dark uniforms. An old lady told me that she is the Mother Superior, and like a mother to all the girls, and she'll be like a mother to me, too. She asked me: "What is your name?" I said: "Giuditta". - "How old are you?" I looked up at the neighbor and she said: "She is five and a half". Mother Superior said: "There are three little girls your age here, you can play with them."

She took me by the hand and we went out to the yard. I saw girls in all sizes, and on the side there were three little girls playing tag. When we approached, they stopped playing and Mother Superior said: "A new girl has arrived. Her name is Giuditta; I want you to welcome her". - "Yes, Mother Superior", they said in a chorus. Mother Superior left and one of the girls came to me, held my hand and said: "I am Giulietta, the tall girl is Cristina and the short girl is Manuela. How old are you?" I said: "Five and a half". - "Great! Me too! Cristina is six and Manuela is only five. Do you want to play with us?" - "No, I'll just watch". - "As you wish".

After a while, Cristina came to me and asked: "Tell me, where are your parents?" - "I don't know". - "How come you don't know?" - "My mother was taken by the Nazis, and my father I don't know by whom". - "I guess God took him. He took my father, too."

- "And I have a father who is sick; he is in the hospital". - "And my father is a drunkard, and my mother has two babies and another one in her belly".

- "What's a drunkard?" - "Look at her! She doesn't know what a drunkard is!"

- "So what, dummy! You think that everyone has to know what a drunkard is?... She turned to me: "A drunkard is a man who drinks lots of wine and walks like this". She walked like a duck swaying from side to side and suddenly she fell. They burst out laughing and then all three of them, walked like drunken ducks and fell in a pile on top of one another, laughing wildly. Suddenly a nun came and said angrily: "What's all this commotion? Get inside!" The nun went in ahead and Cristina walked behind her on tiptoes, imitating the nun's walk, and they all three covered their mouths not to burst out laughing.

"Giuditta, we must stand in pairs before we enter the dinning -hall. Do you want to stand with me?" Manuela asked. I agreed. We entered quietly. I saw many long tables. All the girls sat down without a word and bowed their heads. The nun on duty said a blessing and everyone mumbled "Amen". They took the spoons and ate the soup. No one raised her eyes from the plate. Only I didn't eat. The nun came to me: "Why aren't you eating?" -" I am not hungry". -" That's not an excuse. You have to eat with everyone." Another nun came to her and whispered something in her ear. I heard: " trauma"... "mother"... The nun on duty said: " This time I won't force you because you are new, but from tomorrow you'll have to eat with everyone else, and in any case there isn't much food and you have to be strong." They all ate slices of bread with margarine and I saw that they left crumbs in their plates. I Quietly asked Manuela: " Why do you leave food in your plate?" She didn't answer. The nun came to me and said: " We don't talk here, not even in a whisper." (In our house it was quite the opposite. We always talked around the table. My mother told about the people she met, I told what Clara said and my grandmother told tales about me..). When the meal was over and everyone went out in pairs, I asked Manuela again: " So tell me, why did everyone leave food on their plates?" A big girl heard me and said: "I'll tell you why. It's for the criminals who come to gather crumbs." -"What criminals?" -" The dead criminals, those who are in purgatory and have to repent for their sins." -" What, they come from hell?!" -" No, in hell are the big criminals, and whoever is in hell, can't get out. The purgatory is in the middle, between paradise and hell, and the small criminals are there. There they have to undergo torments until they are cleansed of their sins, and then they enter paradise all pure." -"Ah"..(But why did they put them in the purgatory, if all the time they are released and move around free...)

After the meal we entered the classroom in pairs and sat behind desks. The nun asked me my name and then she told us to sit with straighten backs and hands crossed behind. She said it's concentration. After a long time I asked: " What do you teach in class?" She said: "First of all, we teach to shut up. Then we teach not to talk without permission. Because you didn't ask for permission, you'll sit alone in the other room for half an hour and not make a sound!"

After a long time she came in. I asked: " Have I finished sitting the half hour?" She said angrily: " Don't speak until you are spoken to! And follow orders without arguments! Because you are new here, I'll forgive you this time, but you better remember not to burst out again- or you'll be punished."

I returned to the class and she told us the story of Jesus. We learnt that Jesus, son of God, came down from heaven. It happened like this: his father, Joseph the carpenter, and his mother, Maria the virgin, entered one night their barn in Bethlehem, and found on the straw a baby sent by heaven. At that moment, a big golden star shone in the sky, and three angels came to announce to them that Jesus was sent to save the people and bring redemption to the world.(If only God would send him again to save the world from the despicable Nazis!)

When we went to the dormitory, many girls surrounded me and asked:

- "Hey, you, the new one, what's your name?"

- "Giuditta".

- "Why are you here?" I kept silent.

- "Speak up, don't be shy", said a big girl.

- "I was brought here but only for the time being"...

- "What do you mean?"

- "Only until my mother and grandmother will come back, after they are let go by the kidnappers".

- "What?! Who brought you here?"

- "The neighbor".

- "Why?"

- "Because the Nazis kidnapped my mother and my grandmother".

- "Jesus Christus! They kidnapped her Mamma and Nonna!"

- "So what," said a girl, "my mother died when I was born, and my granny raised me instead, 'cause my father couldn't, and when my granny got sick- my father brought me to the convent." (What, there are also good grandmothers?!)

- "And me and my sister are so poor that we didn't even have a slice of bread in the house, so our parents brought us here to feed us."

- "My mom gave me as a present to my aunt when I was born, 'cause my aunt couldn't have any children; but afterwards my aunt died, and my mom had twins, so she brought me here."

Suddenly a nun appeared: "What's this meeting? Get into your beds immediately!" She came to me and said: "You will sleep in the bed next to Angela and this is your night-gown". She handed me a sleeping-gown that reached to the floor. "Here you have to undress under the cover, out of modesty. Angela will help you today but tomorrow you will do it by yourself. Now kneel and say your prayers." - "What prayers?" - "Don't you know anything?!" She nearly exploded. "I see that everything has to be explained to you.

Angela, teach her the prayer, so that tomorrow night I can listen to her saying it by heart." She stood aside while Angela prayed with me. - "Now get into bed and cross your arms over your chest!" I didn't know how, so she crossed them and said: "This is how you're supposed to sleep, 'buona notte'". She switched off the light and left.

It was dark and I was suddenly alone and my mother wasn't there. I cried: "Mamma, where are you? I'm alone, and I don't know how to sleep in an empty bed! Mamma, I'm cold without you. I don't even have your nightgown to hold, and I don't even have Angelica my doll. I don't know what I'm doing here, instead of being at home with you! Mamma, what happened to us? Why did they take you away? Why didn't I go with you? Why didn't you say you wanted me to come with you? Why didn't you say anything?

Mamma, I love you so much, then why didn't I say that I want to go with you? Why did you leave me?! Why did you let them take you away from me? Mamma, I want you!

MAMMA!!!" Suddenly the nun appeared: "What is going on here? Stop crying! Why are you crying?" - "I want my Mamma!!!" - "There is no point in crying, tears won't bring her back." I cried harder. - "Stop it at once! You want to wake all the girls? They are all away from their mothers, but none of them cries like you." Suddenly Angela appeared. She told the nun: "It's okay. You can go. I'll calm her." The nun left. Angela stroked my hair and

said: "Don't cry. Your mother will come back." - "When?" - "Soon. Sh...sh...here it's not allowed to cry loudly.

Calm down, Giuditta, you'll see that everything will turn out fine". - "Can I sleep in your bed? I don't like to sleep by myself." - "No, no, it's absolutely forbidden! The nun makes a nightly inspection, and we will both be punished. I promise I'll stay with you until you'll fall asleep" and she continued stroking my hair.

I woke up with a feeling that something terrible had happened. Mamma! Mamma is gone!!! Angela appeared: "Buon giorno", Giuditta. Dress quickly. Mother Superior wants to talk to you." She brought me to her. Mother Superior looked kindly at me and said: "Sit down, Giuditta. I want to explain to you something, because you are a big girl already. Here in the convent, all the girls have parents who are sick or poor and can't take care of them, but all are Christians and you are the only Jew. You know already that outside the convent there are bad Nazis who catch Jews, so, if by chance, someone from the outside will ask you if you are a Jew- you must say you are a Christian and deny that you are a Jew."

I thought: Everything happened so fast. I don't understand. What had I done? Why? Where is Mommy? I said: "Madre, please take me back to the place where the Nazi asked me the question, because I want to tell him that I want to go with Mommy!" - "What are you thinking of? You can't turn the wheel back, and even if it were possible, I wouldn't have let you go back there. It's very dangerous for you, and your mother isn't there anymore; they took her to a far-away place." - "But I want my Mommy!"

- "Believe me, child, you did well that you didn't go with her, and maybe... maybe she'll still return." - "When?" - "Only God knows that, child." - "I also forgot there my doll, Angelica. I hugged her very tightly. I don't understand how she fell!" - "I don't know where the doll is, and in any case it's not allowed to play with dolls here, but you can play with the three little girls." She smiled at me. (I like her soft voice and kind eyes.) She called Angela: "Take her to the yard to play with the little ones." - "Yes, Reverend Mother."

I asked Angela: "Are you a child or a woman?" She smiled: "I'm a young girl. Here are your friends."

At night I again couldn't sleep. I wept quietly under the cover: "Jesus or God, make it so that the Nazis won't do anything bad to my Mommy and that she'll come back to me"! Mommy, I miss you so much! I want you with me!"

Before I opened my eyes in the morning, I said to myself: I wish that when I'll open my eyes, I'll find myself in my house next to Mommy! I quickly opened my eyes, but instead of seeing my mother, I saw Jesus' cross on the wall opposite my bed. I was always afraid that my mother will disappear, that's why I slept in her bed embracing her tightly. In the mornings I discovered that she had gone to work and her nightgown was clasped in my hand. What I always feared now really happened! My mother is gone and so is her nightgown. "Where are you, Mommy? It can't be that that happened! Maybe it's only a bad dream that I can't wake up from? Yesterday the nun said that for every sin there is a

punishment, so maybe because I cursed grandma, they took you and grandma? Mamma, come take me with you!"

Angela came to my bed: " 'Buongiorno', Giuditta. Don't look so lost... You'll find out that it's not so terrible here. You'll get used to it. Most of the Sisters are good -hearted, except for one or two." -" But I don't want to be here!" She said: " You'll see that everything will turn out well."

After breakfast, the girl who sat opposite me asked: " Why didn't you say the blessing?" What blessing?" -" Don't you know the blessing? What Christian girl doesn't know the blessing?" -" I'm not a Christian girl." -" What are you saying! Even so, you have to say a blessing for the food you get." -" All right, teach me, then."

"Mamma, I remember that you said that I am dear to you, but I didn't say that you are dear to me. Come so that I'll say what I didn't get to tell you. I know they didn't take you far away, so come back to me, Mommy!"

Everything is so strange and different from what I know: the clothes, the crosses, the high walls and all the rules; if they hadn't spoken Italian, I would have thought that I'm in another country.

Here I have to be quiet everywhere: in the dinning room, in the classroom and in church. It's forbidden to feel full (but sometimes I eat the crumbs because I'm still hungry), it's forbidden to be impertinent, it's forbidden to cry and it's forbidden to dance.

But we, the little ones, go to the rear wall. There we climb on the gate, when the nuns go to pray. Thank God, they pray almost every hour. Sometimes we dance, but one of us is always on the lookout, to warn us if a nun is coming. We have a good time when the nuns aren't around. What disturbs me most is that there are so many supervising eyes. They watch me like a hundred grandmothers!

At night I cried: " Mamma, I know that you loved me very much, but what happened to all the love, where did it go? Why did you take it with you? I know that all that happened was my fault. EVERYTHING!"

While I was drinking water in the rear yard, one of the nuns told me to let the water run longer before I close the faucet, because the criminals are thirsty too. I don't understand why everyone here cares so much about the dead criminals! And how do they manage to drink before I close the faucet, are they so quick? Maybe they have cups in their hands and they wait patiently near the faucets? Maybe they have beaks like birds? And how come I can't see them? And when do they torture them in purgatory if all the time they roam free? In the evening I asked Angela and she said: " Isn't it true that in the dark you don't see anything but all the things are there anyway? We don't see the criminals, because they are 'in the dark' for us; they suffer the tortures at night and only during the day they roam free. We must pity them because they are very miserable." (I think their lives aren't so bad...) Before I fell asleep I thought: I'm trained here differently from what I had been trained at home. Mamma told me to eat everything; here they tell me to leave crumbs on the plate.

Grandma said that Christians are 'phooya', and here a girl said that Jews are 'phooya'. Each of them... believes that what they said is correct!

Before supper we played in the yard, but when I saw that it began to be dark, I went to the entrance gate, clung to it and looked across the street. Manuella and Cristina came. "Giuditta, why aren't you playing with us? Why are you standing here?" -" I'm waiting for my mother." -" What, she told you she'll come?" -"No, but every day at this hour she would come back to me." -" But they took her far away!" -" Yes, but she's on the way and she'll arrive soon." -"You are waiting in vain, come play with us." -"Play by yourselves." " It's your lose..."

"Do you remember, Mamma, how I stood every evening by the window to see you when you came from work? You always looked tired and sad, but at the moment you saw me running towards you, you would smile like the sun, open your arms wide and we would embrace with all our might. You always told me that you had thought about me all day long, and had waited for the moment to come back home to see me. I loved hearing you say that. I want to hear you say it again. A pity, they are calling me to go inside, but if you didn't get to come today, then tomorrow I'll wait for you here again, at the same time, for tomorrow you'll surely come."

" If you'll try with all your might to be good, you'll repent for your sins and no harm will befall you," said the nun. If she only knew what a bad girl I was! One day, after Clara, my Christian friend, taught me how to cross myself, I went home and said:" Look what I learnt today!" I went down on my knees and crossed myself! My grandma almost fainted. She spanked me hard and said:" You bad little girl! You know that you are Jewish and forbidden to cross yourself!" My mother defended me and said to her:" It's only a game for her, she doesn't mean it seriously." My words have a terrible strength, for I cursed my grandma and she disappeared! No one must know, especially God, for if He does, He will punish me even more...

Now I practice all the time at being good. Because I had been bad, I now have to be very good, in order to repent for my sins and in order that my mother will be returned to me. I'm sick and tired of being good all the time, but I have no other choice!...

" Hello God. I heard that you live in heaven and rule the world and that you look down on everyone and punish for every little sin. But my sin wasn't so big, because then, when I crossed myself, I was only kidding! Maybe another girl who resembles me, sinned a huge sin, and you exchanged our punishments?... I deserve only the small punishment. I am asking you to correct quickly the mistake and bring me back my mother. If you wanted me to learn a lesson- I did. Lately I'm a very good girl. If you don't believe me, you can ask anyone you like.

My mother told me once that you love me, but if you let them take away my mother, then you love me in a very STRANGE way. Love me so that I'll feel it, if you want me to love you too.

Good night to you."

Today I thought: "I know very well why I was punished - because I didn't choose to go with my mother! What sort of a girl doesn't choose her mother?...The Nazis are very bad, but I am also very bad. I'm the worst in the world!"

Again I asked Mother Superior: "Why were my mother and grandmother kidnapped?"

She answered: "The Nazis are very bad people and it's totally impossible to understand their actions. But don't be afraid. Here you are protected in the shadow of the cross, and no danger threatens you. Jesus will protect you from all evil; just don't disclose to anyone that you are Jewish."

And I won't tell anyone, ever, that I am bād, because for my secret there is no forgiveness. No one will ever know: not the Father, not Mother Superior, nor God. What luck that they teach here to be silent, so my secret won't escape me without my wanting it to.

Today it's Saturday, the day that belonged to me and my mother; when we always went for a walk to 'giardino publico' to play with my little ball. Afterwards, when we became tired, we lay on the grass embracing each other, and my mother told me fairy tales. I liked it best when she said that I was sweeter and more beautiful than any princess, kissing me all over my face.

"Where are you, Mommy? Come to me, my arms are full with hugs for you!"

As I was standing today near the gate, I saw a cat across the wall, a thin, gray cat. It must be a Christian cat if it roams freely.

It's Sunday and it's the only day when I'm not waiting alone by the gate. All the parents and relatives come for a visit, and all the girls wait excitedly by my side. One by one the parents come, and I'm waiting and waiting for my mother. At the end, only I and Stella remain by the gate, for no one came to us. Stella is a little older than I am, and she is really miserable, for she doesn't have any parents at all. She is standing beside me crying, and I, too, want to cry, but I'm holding the tears in my heart, where they flow silently. I am not to be pitied, because I still have a mother, it's just that she is far away and hasn't arrived yet.

In bed, at night, I cry silently, because I don't understand: "why is it that you always did what I wanted, mother, and now you don't do what I ask you again and again?...Maybe you don't love me anymore? Maybe you found another little girl to love? But you will always be my mother, always! Is it true that I'll always be your little girl?"

And there is no one here to console me when I cry...

"Dear God, it's me again. Today I want to ask you some questions:

- 1) How come Jesus has two fathers and I have only one?
 - 2) If you are Jewish and Jesus, your son, is Christian, then how is it that you are of the same family?
 - 3) What are you: a Christian, an Italian, or a Jew?
 - 4) Giulietta said that you invented the world from your head. Is it true?
 - 5) If you don't answer me, does it mean that you are angry with me?
 - 6) Is it true that you are more powerful than the Nazis?
- If you are so strong and a Jew like me, then please bring me back my Mommy.
Thank you for listening to me and please do what I ask you. I promise to be always good.
Giuditta "

Today, in the cathedral, there was a ceremony of confirmation. The girls wore white dresses and had garlands on their heads. They received the New Testament and a picture of the Madonna.

I wait all week for Sunday morning, for it's the only day during the week that we go out of the convent, in the morning, to breathe free air and see the world. Then we enter the beautiful cathedral. I love the light that is almost dark; I love the beautiful statues, pictures, windows and ceiling - they are all so beautiful that I don't know on which to look first. I feel calm and at peace and near to Jesus and Maria.

On the way back, I heard, today, sounds of music from one of the windows. Then we passed by a man who roasted chestnuts over coals. I felt warm when I passed by and they had a wonderful smell.

" Mamma, I miss you so much now, because these were the days when you weren't working, the days when we strolled in the park away from grandma, when you were only mine. Look what happened to us and I don't understand!"

I approached the nun on duty: " I want to talk to Mother Superior." -" About what do you want to speak to her?" -" About God." She brought me to her. -" You wanted to talk to me, child?" -" Yes, Reverend Mother. I wanted to ask you when will my mother come back." -" I don't know, my child. I inquired and was told that your mother and grandmother were taken to a very far-away place." -" I also want to know: is there a Jewish and a Christian God, or is it the same one?" -" There is only one God, child." "Does God love Jews?" -" Of course, my child, we are all His children." -" Then why did He allow the Nazis to take my mother and grandmother?" She sighed. -" Mysterious are the ways of God. Giuditta, I wanted to ask you: wouldn't you want your grandmother to come back, too? -" Maybe sometime..." -"Don't you love your grandmother?" -" Not so

much... " -" May I know why?" -" She always hit me hard when my mother was at work and I ran to Clara, my friend." -" I see...Giuditta, I want to remind you, we live in a time that is difficult for all of us, but especially for Jews. That's why you are forbidden to go out of the convent, for the Nazis kidnap Jews also from the streets. If a stranger might happen to come here, and ask you if you are a Jew- firmly deny. Do you understand, my child?" -" Yes, Mother Superior." -" Jesus directed you to us, in His shadow you are saved and no harm will befall you."

At night I said:" Mommy, I'm still afraid. If you had been here then fear wouldn't have dared crawl into my bed. Why did you leave me, Mamma? Why did you let them take you from me? Now there is no one to say." My Darling"; no one to kiss me good night. Please come, Mommy!"

Yesterday, when we walked in pairs to a different cathedral, we passed near my house! I saw a boy's head through the window of our room and I felt so bad that strangers took our house for themselves! I was so angry! I told my friend that the apartment with the round balcony was once mine, and she said:" Really? Then how come it's not yours any more?" I didn't know what to answer her!

As if that wasn't enough- on the way back I saw a young mother walking with a baby in her arms. Suddenly a car stopped near her, a Nazi came out, held her by her shoulders and pushed her and her baby into the car. I'm sure she is Jewish, for only Jews are being taken like that in the middle of the street without anyone saying a word. I felt so lousy! Luckily one mother that came to visit, brought all of us printed notices, on which Hitler was drawn drowning in the sea and all kinds of fish attacking him. We were very glad and shouted:" Hitler the wicked- you should drown!" Then I took a black pencil and colored the picture black and I felt better. I hid it under my mattress, so that I'll look at it each time I feel bad.

"Dear Jesus Christ,

I heard a lot of good things about you. I know that you are very important, for you are the second in line after God. I also know you are very good, for you love people, especially little children, and you guard them so that nothing bad will happen to them. I know you are also very smart, and like a magician, and you can do miracles. I want to ask you to do a little miracle for me and bring me back my Mommy. My name is Giuditta and I am a Jewish girl who now lives in a convent. The devilish Nazis took my mother and my grandmother and they don't want to bring them back. If it's hard for you to return them both, then bring me back only my Mommy. I know it's not difficult for you. Do it quickly, please, and I promise to be good now and later on.

Thank you."

Julia came back from her grandmother's funeral and said:" You know, when my Grandma died, they buried her deep in the ground and put lots of flowers on her."

- "What? Like in a wedding?" - "Yes, they dressed her in new white clothes, put white powder on her face, so that she'll come to paradise beautiful- because whoever is not powdered- will not be accepted." Rosalia said: "When I attended my uncle's funeral, he lay without moving like a statue. I kissed him on his forehead and he was as cold as ice." (Statues are people who froze to death?...) - "They buried him?" - "Sure, what did you think?" - "Not everyone is buried: some are put into the ground, some are turned into statues and some are turned into angels that fly up into the blue sky." - "What nonsense you are saying, Giuditta! They bury everyone." - "You know, when the father of my grandmother died he was very old, he was seventy." - "So what! The father of my grandfather is a hundred!" - "Mine is two hundred!" - "What are you bragging. My grandparents are two thousand!" - "There is no such number with people." - "You should know, that I'll never be old." - "When you grow up more and more, you will be old." Everyone that is old has to die?" - "Sure." - "What happens when an old person wants to continue to live, he still has to die?" - "Of course." - "But if he is not tired of life?" "There isn't such a thing. All old people get tired." (Damn!)

"Girls, do you know what happened?" asked Cristina. - "What?" - "A bomb fell on my neighbor's house, and the house fell on them!" - "They died?" - "Sure." - "How pitiful!" - "So what, everyone will die at the end." - "No, they will die only if they are unlucky." - "Nonsense!" - "I won't", I said. - "When your turn will come, you too will die." - "My turn will never come. Each time there is a line, I'll stand at the end of it, and when again my turn will almost come- I'll again stand at the end of the line, and so on, again and again." - "There is no such thing. It's impossible to run away from death." - "It's possible. I'll run quickly and he won't catch me." - "He will. He is the fastest in the world." - "You know, girls, I want to die", said Claudia. - "Are you crazy?!" - "No. It's best for the dead, because they have wings and they fly to the sky." - "What, they are like birds?" - "No, they are like ghosts." - "Is it true that little children who die become angels and get wings?" - "It's true, but you can't die when you want, you have to die only when you are told." - "I want wings!" - "Only God will decide when you'll die." - "If I won't receive wings- I won't agree to die!" - "No one asks you!" - "Don't listen to her. If you die, you'll be an angel and also a golden statue and you will be put in the church", I said. - "In your dreams! Only from saints they make statues." - "Then how do you become a saint?" - "First you have to be a very good nun and then." - "Girls, come to the classroom, the nun is calling us."

At noon we asked Angela: "Is it true that everyone has to die at the end?" - "It is true." - "I won't die!" - "Giuditta, everyone has to die in order to get to the next world." - "I don't want to go there, I want to stay here!" - "That's impossible." - "But if someone behaves very well, he'll never die. Right?" - "Wrong", Margot said, "whoever behaves well, will go to paradise and he'll have it the best in the world!" - "That's right", said Cristina, "and whoever doesn't behave well, will go to hell and he'll have it bad for all his life!" - "Only those who are bad, God punishes with death." Angela said: "Death isn't a punishment, it's part of nature." - "But death doesn't have to happen to all, it can leave a few alive. Me, for example." - "Is it possible that you don't have to die?" Asked Manuela. - "It's

impossible. I suggest that you'll talk it over with Mother Superior". -"Giuditta, you'll talk to her, she loves you best.(What, Really?!...)

I was taken to Mother Superior. "About what did you want to talk to me, my child?" "About death. Angela said that we would all die in the end and I, too. Is this true?" -"This fate awaits all of us, my child." -"Me, too?" -"Yes, but not now, of course, some day." "Then everyone has to die?" -"Yes." -"Then who will remain?" -"The new children that will be born." -"At the end, they too will die?" -"Yes." -"Then who will stay?" She sighed. -"Then why all the time people live and die?" -"That's what God decided." -"If the Nazis won't kill me, then I won't die, right?" -"Not now, but you will when you will be very old." -"If I'll be good all the time then God won't punish me with death and I'll remain alive." -"Everyone dies, the good and the bad." -"But it's not fair, only the bad should die!" -"Death doesn't distinguish between people; but you mustn't worry about it now, it will happen in the far away future. Now go out and play, my child." -"Grazie, Madre." (But I don't agree. All the people I love will live forever, and all the rest will live for a thousand years!)

Sister Teresa said today that if someone did something wrong and he asks for forgiveness and atones for his sins, then God forgives him and he becomes good again.

I was awfully glad, for now I know I can correct it when I am bad and do everything in order to be good. If I'll be very, very good, then God or Jesus will cancel my punishment and bring me back my mother. Now I'll listen to the Sisters even more and do everything quietly like I should. I'm so sorry I hadn't been good before, for if I would have been good, then none of this would have happened to me. Now I know that if you are bad you are being punished terribly.

Now I understand why I was brought here. Here it's like purgatory. There are high walls here and heavy gates, so that I won't be able to get out until I'll finish being punished. When I'll repent for everything, the punishment will end, my mother will return and we will be together again!

Sister Anna-Maria, who hit me once with a ruler on my fingers when I didn't fold my hands, called me to her and said: "Giuditta, I want to save your sinful soul, so that you won't inherit hell like all Jews. If you convert, you'll inherit paradise." -"Jews won't inherit paradise?" -"Of course not, they killed our Lord Jesus!" -"That's not true!" -"Don't talk back to me, impudent girl! The AntiChristus is killing the Jews because they tortured and killed Jesus. They crucified him and they are being punished to this day. You should be ashamed of being Jewish, instead of bragging about it! It's so easy to become a Christian. All you have to do, at first, is cross yourself.(She wants to convert me by force, but I have to remain Jewish and not to cross myself, like grandma said.) I don't understand why you are so stubborn to stay Jewish.(Because it's important to my mother and grandmother. They took away everything from me, I won't let them take away also this, even though I

don't know what exactly this is...) It's well known that all Jews are damned (you are damned, witch!) and treacherous (maybe in this she is right? I betrayed my mother with the Christian neighbor and God with Jesus!) It's my religious duty to save your soul. What do you say, young girl?" -"Ah... I have to think about this"... -"You still have to think?! You ungrateful girl! Jesus protects you, we hide you, you eat our bread, and you are not ready to make the little sacrifice to become a Christian?! I'm going to talk to Mother Superior!" She went quickly with a red face to the nun's wing. I followed her from afar. When she entered Mother's Superior's room, I approached the door, that was a bit open, and heard Mother Superior say: "No. I want her to decide of her own free will. I can't stand coercion. I won't allow anyone to force her. It will come in time. We need patience." I saw Sister Sofia approaching and I ran away thinking: I won't cross myself even if I'll have to stay here a hundred years!

I showed off in front of the girls that I'm different from them because I am Jewish. Marcella, who is older, heard. She came to me and said: "You aren't a Jew at all. Do you want me to prove it to you?" -"Go ahead, prove!" She said: "Show me your belly-button." -"My belly-button?!" -"Yes." I showed her. "Well, what's with my belly-button?" -"Exactly as I thought. Your belly button is pressed in, like in all Christian people. With Jews, the "chupchick" of the belly button, sticks out. Look for yourself, you don't have a "chupchick" at all, see?" I told her that that's not a proof and that I want to check out all the girls by myself. We did a review of all the bellies-buttons. I passed from one to the other, with Marcella behind me, and indeed in everyone it was pushed in. Marcella asked: "Now do you believe me?" I had no choice and I said that I do. She crowed: "You see, you are like all of us, you are not at all different!" (Now I don't understand what I am - a Christian or a Jew?...)

We learnt today, that Jesus said, that one must always take care of the poor and always share what you have with them. Sister Anna-Maria said that if we have two shirts, we have to give one to the poor. All the girls agreed, but I said that I wouldn't give the poor if I'll have two shirts, I'll give only if I'll have three. The Sister said: "The smart thing is to give up something even if you don't have much." I said: "If I have two and I give him one, then I won't have a shirt to change to!" The Sister said: "Then wash your one shirt and wear it the day after." I said: "And if it won't dry? No, I'll give only if I'll have three." I saw that she was angry.

Then we learnt that Jesus loved peace. He said that one mustn't fight and if someone slaps you, you mustn't slap back, but turn your other cheek. It annoyed me and I said: "If someone slaps me, I'll give him two slaps in return!" Anna-Maria was terribly angry and said: "For this you'll be punished. Come with me to Mother Superior!" She left the girls alone in the class and brought me to Madre. The Reverend Mother said: "Yes, Anna - Maria, what happened?" The Sister told her what I said about the slaps and also about the shirt. Mother superior said: "Leave us alone, please." Anna-Maria went out. Mother

Superior asked: "Do you think Jesus was wrong, that one mustn't present the second cheek?" I said: "Of course not! If the Nazis had lived in the time of Jesus, then he wouldn't have said that; but then he didn't know that they snatch mothers from little children." She said: "I see, but you better forget what happened, my child, try to be a good Christian. You do want to be a nun, don't you?" I didn't know what to answer so I remained silent. She said: "Try to be more calm, though, I know, it's difficult for you. You may go, my child."

Sister Anna-Maria waited in the hall. She asked: "What punishment did you get?" I said: "None!" I saw that she was very angry. She said: "I'll rescue your soul, you damned Jew!" When I saw Angela I told her about the cheek and the shirt and I asked her what 'damned' means. She said that the Sister thinks I'm bad and I have to be made good. I asked: "You, too, think I'm bad?" She said: "No, you are, ^{not} you are just a little different, that's all." I asked her: "You would have given the poor a shirt, if you had only two?" She answered: "Yes, we all have to learn to sacrifice and give up our comfort for others." I said: "Okay, then I'll give the other shirt, but I'll never give the other cheek. I would never in my life love my enemies, like Jesus wanted, because they didn't take my shirt, they took my mother! I'm ready to love all sinners, except the Nazis. I'll never forgive them! Never! If Jesus were living today, he, too, would not forgive them!"

On Sunday, when I and Stella were left alone again by the gate, we saw a young woman pass by, pushing a baby's carriage. Suddenly Stella said: "Lady, lady, would you like to be my mother?" The woman stopped and looked at Stella in amazement. She said: "I'm sorry, poor child, but I have children of my own", and she walked away quickly as if someone was chasing her. I said to Stella: "You can't ask for another mother. Either you have a mother or you don't." She said: "No! I want a mother too!" Then a fat, bald man passed by and she said: "Mister, mister, do you agree to be my father?" He stopped opposite us and asked: "Don't you have a father, little girl?" She answered: "I have no father and no mother." He asked: "You, too, don't have a father?" I said: "I have one, but he is far away." He turned to Stella: "I'm sorry that I can't be your father, little girl, but don't cry, look what I have for you!" He took out a green candy from his pocket and gave her. He wiped his eyes and said: "Good-bye, cute girls," and left.

Stella turned to me: "Maybe you will be my sister?" I said: "But we don't have the same parents, nor the same God." -"No, God is shared." -"No, he is separate." -"No, he is twins. If God has a brother, then you can be my sister." -"Okay, but if you are my sister, then give me half of the candy." -"Okay." -"Swear not to tell anyone, for it's a secret." She put her hand in the middle of her chest and said: "I swear on Jesus, Maria and all the saints, that I'll never ever tell anyone that you are my sister." -"Amen!"

We kissed and licked, in turn, the candy.

When we practiced correct handwriting, Sister Maddalena called me to her desk: "Giuditta, do you believe that Jesus was the best man on earth?" -"Yes." -"You know that he was born Jewish but decided to leave Judaism and set up a better religion. Why

don't you follow his footsteps?" -"Because my mother doesn't allow me." (What would she think if I'd suddenly turn Christian? She'll think that she can't rely on me, that if for a moment she isn't around, I immediately change...)-"You've already learnt a little about the Christian religion and you surely know that this is the true religion." -"I'm sure the Jews also think that..."-"No one loves the Jews, Giuditta. They always suffered and now they suffer more than ever. It doesn't pay for you to tie your fate with their fate.(But I am already Jewish!) Yesterday I met a nun from another convent and she told me that two Jewish girls hide in her convent. They have both been baptized as Christians, and now no danger is hovering over them. The minute you stop being a Jew and be baptized, you will be secured from all evil and be safe forever. You could at least be a Christian, until the war will be over, and then we'll see..." (I don't want to forget who I am!) -"I'll think about it..." -"Think, my child, I'm sure at the end you'll see the light."

Mother Superior asked me today: "Giuditta, why do you stand every evening by the gate?" -"I'm waiting for my mother." -"My child, you must understand, when the Nazis take somebody- it's for a long time." -"Why?" -"Because they take Jews for forced labor." -"My mother will run away from them!" -"It's impossible to run away and your mother will have to work for a long time, there is no point in your waiting for her here." -"But in the end she'll come, and I want to be here when she arrives." -"If she'll come, I promise I'll immediately call for you." -"I want to be the first to see her!" She sighed. -"Well, my child, as soon as it darkens, go inside." I promised.

Manuela came to me: "Your mother is still far away?" -"Yes." -"Then how will she come?" -"On foot. It takes her a long time because she is careful that the Nazis won't see her; that's why she walks only at night." -"When will she arrive?" -"Or today, or tomorrow or later."

"Dear Jesus Christ,
I found out that you're a Jew like me and your name was once Joshua. I was so glad that you are a Jew, too, 'cause I thought you are only a Christian, and now I'm sure you'll help me. I know you are very busy and that some people asked you before me, but I am a girl from your people, and besides, they always ask for something different, and I all the time ask for the same thing. I told you before that the Nazis took my mother and haven't yet returned her to me. I love her and I miss her terribly. I know I was once a bad girl, but today I'm very good and quiet. I even leave crumbs for the criminals, even though they don't deserve them and I remain a bit hungry, but I know it makes you happy; so now it's your turn to make me happy. You know how, but if, by chance, you forgot: bring me back my Mommy!!

It's me, Giuditta"

Before we went to church, I heard two big girls talking. One girl said: "The Madonna couldn't have a baby because she was a virgin." - "What's a virgin?", I asked. - "This one, her ears pop up! It's none of your business!" - "I only asked"... - "Go bother the nun". I went to Maddalena: "What's a virgin?" - "Why do you want to know?" - "Because of the Madonna.." - "Well, a virgin is a woman who is not married... not exactly... it's a little complicated"... she stammered. (A virgin must be something bad, but what?...) The nun said: "Girls, stay in pairs, we are going in to pray".

When we entered the church I said: "Holy Mary! I know that you are a very good woman, even though you are a virgin. I wanted to tell you that I'm also very good, and I don't know why I'm being punished so long. I heard that you, too, were Jewish and your name was Miriam. You are very lucky that you are in heaven, because if you were here- the Nazis would have kidnapped you too, and then, how would you feel?... That's how my mother feels. The Nazis kidnapped her and they don't want to bring her back! I heard that you can do miracles, so, please, make a miracle for my mother, 'cause I love her very much and she loves me too".

I thank you and I'm waiting for the miracle.

Giuditta "

There is a nun here I'm afraid of. Every evening, before I fall asleep, she comes to my bed, lifts the blanket off my feet, and hits me four times on my legs with a long, thin stick. It hurts me terribly, but I bite my lips in order not to cry. I don't understand why she does it. Does she hate me? Or maybe because I am Jewish?

Yesterday I tried to get into Angela's bed, but the nun found me and hit me as usual. My three little friends, who sleep at the other end of the dormitory, told me today that she hits them too. At first I thought to tell on her to Madre, but now that I found out that she doesn't hit only me, I think that she doesn't really hate me and maybe that's how you have to treat little girls?...

Yesterday there was a show in the courtyard. The older girls prepared a play about the war between the good and the evil. Many people from the outside came and sat on benches. Only the older girls were allowed to watch, but we, the young girls, were not allowed. No one saw me hide behind the last bench. The play was about a dispute between the good angel who was dressed in white and Satan who was dressed in black. Between them stood a girl and they both tried to convince her to choose between them. The girl couldn't make up her mind but, at the end, she listened to the voice of Satan. The good angel flew away and was gone and Satan laughed wildly and said that he won.

I don't know why but I cried and everyone turned his or her head to see who was crying. One of the Sisters came to me angrily, brought me to Mother Superior's office and told me to wait.

Then I remembered how it all had happened. My mother was called to the public phone, while I stood on the stairs. I couldn't hear what she said but when she put down the phone I saw that she was as white as the wall. I asked: "Mamma, what happened?" but she didn't answer. Immediately afterwards she and grandma packed everything into suitcases and the house looked so empty. I asked: "Mamma, where are we going?" again she didn't answer me and I felt that something terrible was going to happen. We went by foot a long way until we came to a long building with a big room all lit up. In the corner was a bench on which my grandmother, my mother and the Christian neighbor sat. I stood opposite them. At my side stood a tall officer in a brown uniform who asked me: "With whom do you want to go?" Something in his voice told me that he didn't mean 'go for a walk'. I wanted to ask: "Go where?" but I knew that nobody would answer me. I looked at my grandmother, with her I certainly didn't want to go. I looked at my mother. She suddenly looked so different. She had a white mask on her face and her eyes, which were always so loving, looked at me and as if they said: "Don't choose me!!!" I pointed at the Christian neighbor.

At that moment, the officer shouted something, four soldiers came out from another room, took my grandmother and my mother and I ran to my mother, but the officer caught me and held me. At the other end of the room, the soldiers held my mother. She stretched her arms towards me and opened her mouth, but no sound came. I cried MAMMA!!! But they took her away...

Mother Superior came and asked: "My child, why are you crying so hard?" I didn't answer. She gave me a glass of water. After a long time I stopped crying. Madre said: "You knew you were forbidden to watch the play, why did you?" -"I was curious." -"Do you admit you behaved badly?" -"Yes." -"I'm glad you admit you were wrong, because it's very important to confess for bad things you do and always tell the truth. Because you admitted- I won't punish you. Tell me, Giuditta, why did you cry?" -"I don't know why." -"If the good angel would have won- you would cry even then?" -"No." -"You didn't like it that the evil won out over the good, right?" I nodded. -"My child, is there something bad that you did that you want to confess about?" I cried and said: "I was a very bad girl that I didn't choose my mother when the Nazi told me to choose. I should have chosen her and not the neighbor, for she is my mother!" -"You were very clever that you didn't choose your mother, for if you had chosen her- the Nazis would have taken you as well and your mother surely wouldn't have wanted that. You made your mother very happy that you didn't choose her, and you should be proud of yourself for being so clever, Giuditta. Now go out and play with your friends, my child."

When I woke up this morning, my stomach hurt and I vomited. The nun on duty ran to me, touched my forehead and said: "We have to call the doctor, the girl is burning up with fever." They brought me into a dark little room and laid me down on a bed. I immediately fell asleep. When I woke up I saw Mother Superior bending over me. "How do you feel, my child?" I cried: "I want my mommy!" She said: "I can't bring you

your mother, nobody can and if you'll cry you'll be even sicker. We'll all help you and you'll be healthy again in a short time." She patted my cheek. The doctor came, examined me and gave me a medicine to drink. Mother Superior asked :'"Dottore', what illness has the little one?" He said a long word. My head and eyes were heavy.

When I woke up Angela was beside my bed. She smiled at me and said that I had slept for two days in a row! I asked: "Angela, what did I have?" She said: "You had very high fever and it was dangerous, for you could have died. Madre, the Sisters and all the girls prayed for you."

When I was alone I said: "Maybe, mother, you too are sick and in bed and that's why you haven't arrived yet. So I'll pray for you to get well and tomorrow I'll wait for you by the gate."

"You are again expecting your mother to come? Why hasn't she come yet?" asked Cristina. -"Because she is still in the labor camp." (Mamma, why did you go so far? Look how long it takes you to come back!) -" I heard that the Nazis turned the Jews into their slaves and that the Jews have to work hard labor without getting paid." -" Why all of a sudden my mother should work for free?! My mother will run away!" -"Also your grandmother will run away?" -"No, my grandmother won't, she's too old." -"Girls, isn't it true that the rotten Nazis will go to hell?" -"Sure! They'll be roasted over the fire and then thrown into the boiling tar!" -"Ya, they will be burned in the fire of hell for ever and ever!" (wonderful!)

-"Do you remember, mother, when I got lost you promised never to leave me? Why didn't you keep your promise? But if you'll return- I'll forgive you. All I want is to sit in your lap embracing you and feel how you kiss my eyes the way I love. But how can you love a girl that betrayed you? I don't know how, but I know you'll forgive me because in all the world you are the only one that will forgive me and go on loving me."

"Mamma, I forgot to tell you something very important: yesterday my first tooth fell. In the morning, while I was eating a slice of bread, I felt something hard, and found that it was a tooth! Linda said: "'Buona Fortuna', Giuditta, your first tooth fell!" She took me to the sink and rinsed the blood out of my mouth.

Do you remember, Mommy, when the tooth shook, you said that when it will fall and I'll give it to you as a present, you'll give me a beautiful present in return? Now it fell and you aren't here, so I keep it for you under the mattress, and when you'll come, you'll give me a present for it.

Linda told me that if I'll put the tooth under my pillow, I'll be able to ask whatever I want. I asked Luisa what she had asked for and she said: " Candies and a doll." I washed the

little tooth and put it under my pillow. Mamma, I decided I'll ask only that you'll come back to me quickly, for that's the most beautiful present I can get."

We were playing 'hide and seek' and I hid behind the big statue in the rear yard. Two nuns passed by and I heard Anna-Maria say: "Giuditta needs a firm hand!" Maddalena said: "No, I don't think so. Besides, she has improved a little. She doesn't burst out like she did at the beginning." -" But she never stands still. We have to watch her with eyes in the back of our heads; on top of that she's also very loud." -"All Jews are loud." -" Italians, too, aren't lacking..." they laughed. -"What do you want from her, she is both Italian and Jewish..." they laughed again and moved away.

I thought: they have no problem sitting straight, but I am not a statue! Why, the devil, do they have to be so strict?

Again I was hit on the legs and I couldn't fall sleep. Suddenly I thought: what if my mother arrives right now, who will open the door for her? I got out of bed and ran barefoot to the heavy door. I tried to open the bolt. I couldn't. I tried again. Suddenly I heard a voice: "Giuditta, what are you doing?" It was Mother Superior! "My child, did you try to run away?" -"No, no, I wanted to open the front door for my mother. I thought that if mother arrives, she won't be able to enter because the door is locked! So I went to open the door"...-" I understand, but she won't come at night and even if she does- she will ring and we will open for her. You can go back to bed now and sleep peacefully." I returned to bed. If Mother Superior promised then I am calm. But it feels so empty in my bed and I want to hold something, but I don't have my Mom's nightgown to hold or my doll. I hugged my shoulders and said: " Look, Mommy, how I put myself to sleep. I hug myself in your place, and I softly sing to myself all the lullabies you sang to me, and I rub my feet where it hurts, and at the end if I'm not yet sleepy, I tell myself a beautiful fairy tale: "once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess"...

Marta, who is Angela's good friend, came to me and said: "I heard that one of the nuns hits you and your three little friends. When you'll be eight, she won't hit you any more." "Why?" -"When you are eight, you go to the Father for confession and he is the one that gives punishments for sins." -"What punishments?" -"They are not exactly punishments, but atonement for sins, to say prayers many times." -"If I do something bad and I ask for forgiveness, then I 'm not really punished?" -"No, but you have to atone for the bad deed and then you are purified and deserving of salvation." -"Great! How I wish I was eight!" I ran quickly and told my three friends what Marta had said. They were glad. I told them: " I have an idea! Let's play 'Confessing to Father!' " They were thrilled. I said: " I'll be the confessing Father first." I put a handkerchief to hide my face. Cristina 'entered' the confessional'. -"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." -"Confess, my child." -"Yesterday I lied to Manuella." -"If you lied, you'll inherit hell. Say quickly five times 'Our Father.' " "Thank you, Father." Manuella 'entered': "Bless me, Father." -"Confess!" -"I told Cristina to go to hell." -"That's a terrible sin. You have to say four times 'Glory to Maria' and three

times 'Our Father'". -"Thank you, Father." Then Giulietta entered. "Bless me, Father." "Confess!" -"I forgot"... -"Think, my child, what have you done?" -"Ah, I remember now. I told Cristina dirty words." -" The one who repents- is forgiven. Say three 'Ave Maria'." "Thank you, Father."

Then we switched parts. When my turn came, I said to Cristina 'the Father': "A long time ago I pulled the chair from under Marcella, and she fell and hurt herself. Also, when she made me 'a face', I stuck out my tongue to her in church." The Father said: "You'll have to do many atonement, for it's very very bad. Say five times 'Our Father', five times 'Ave Maria' and five times 'Glory to Maria' and then Jesus will forgive you." -"Thank you, Father."

In the evening I saw Marta and I told her how we played. I said:" Maybe instead of playing 'Father Confessor', I should play 'the Pope'?" -"Why do you want to be the Pope'?" -"Because he sits on the holy throne, and he wears a king's clothes and he has a beautiful hat like a crown on his head, and everyone who speaks to him, kisses his hand!" She kissed my hand: "Like this?" -"Yes!" I was thrilled.(Tomorrow I'll play 'The Pope' with my friends and I'll get many kisses!)

In the morning, as we were ready to leave, Mother Superior said to me: "Today it's exactly a year since you came to us. How do you feel here, my child?" -"Bene, grazie, Madre."

What a miracle!!! As we return from the church- who do I d see standing outside the gate? My mother!!! I run to her but she doesn't recognize me at first, maybe because of the dress. Suddenly she recognizes me and she stretches her arms to me and I fall into them. I embrace her and cover her face with million little kisses. She kisses me endlessly and hugs me to her in love, and says: "My precious Judithline! I had such a long way to go. I walked in the rain and in the wind. I suffered hunger and thirst, but I made every effort to return to you, my darling." I look at her and see that her dress is torn and that she is barefoot. She looks at me and says: "What a strange dress!" I say: "That's because I am in a convent, but don't worry, I'm not a Christian yet."

Meanwhile, all gather around us and I say proudly: "This is my mother!!" Mother Superior says: "So this is the mother! Bring her in, so that she should eat." We go in, and while you eat hungrily, I see how thin you are. Madre suggests that you rest, in order to recover your strength, but you say to her: "Thank you so much for hiding my beloved daughter, but I want to take her home right away." I'm giving you my hand and I'm weaving goodbye to Mother Superior, to the nuns and to all the girls. I can see in the girls' eyes that they are glad and envious.

We walk quickly and arrive home, and all the neighbors come towards us, and Clara runs to me and gives me her doll. I ask: "Where is grandma?" You say that she went to live with her other daughter. I'm so glad that I say: "If so, I'll draw her a picture, but first lie down and rest because you are tired from the long way." You look at me with eyes that are full of love and say: "You know that you are my best little girl? I love you so much!"

I say: "I love you!! You are the most wonderful mother, there is no mother like you in the whole world! I promise I'll never make you sad again!" We embrace with all our strength. I don't ask you where you were, nor why you didn't come sooner. I don't ask anything; I only embrace you tightly. You smile happily and say: "I'll never leave you! It's so good to be together again! So good!!" I smile, and suddenly Cristina says: "Giuditta, why are you smiling to yourself?" I tremble as if I wake from sleep...but then I say to myself: "We'll soon be back at the convent and I'll see her with my own eyes." We reach the convent, but my mother isn't there!...

This evening when the bad nun came to my bed to hit me, I breathed deeply and asked: "Why do you hit me?" She looked at me for a long moment and then said: "Search within yourself for the sin that you'll be punished for." (Does she know what I had done?...) After she left, Angela came to me: "I heard what she said and I came to the conclusion that she wants to suppress the sin in you and that you'll pay in advance for sins that you will commit. I think she wants to strengthen your ability to suffer, so that you'll know how to stand up under difficulties, for suffering is beneficial for the soul. My uncle told me that whoever suffers in this world, will have a good life in the next world." I sighed. She stroked my hair and said: "Madonna will sweeten your dreams." I stroked my feet where she hit me and slowly the pain passed. "Mamma, I have an idea. What do you think about running away from there, and I'll run away from here, and we'll meet in our old house?...I forgot to tell you that Cristina told me today that you won't come back at all, so I pulled her hair with all my strength, that she should know what it is! But why does it take you so long to come?!"

Today it's Christmas, so we all cleaned the convent until it shone! Then Mother Superior took us to the Duomo, which is the most beautiful cathedral in Italy! When we entered it, we saw in one corner some straw, and on it lay a doll of baby Jesus. Opposite him stood three dolls of grown-ups, who were the three gift-bearing lost kings, and behind and above them was a sparkling golden star with a tail, that lit God's way to the kings. The light fell on little Jesus, and he looked pink and cute. The Father made a special Mass for Jesus. He lifted the wine cup, drank a little from it (which is like Jesus blood) and said: "My blood." Then he took the golden bowl, tasted from the thin, holy bread (which is like Jesus flesh) and said: "My body." That way he could feel Jesus best. Then all the grown-ups stood in line, in order to swallow the sacrament dipped in wine, and receive the priest's blessing. I whispered to the nun: "I want to experience Jesus, too." She said that I am too small and that I'll have to wait with great patience until I grow up, and that it's absolutely not permitted to speak in church, and that it's the last time that she says this to me! Afterwards they played the organ and a choir sang Hallelujah songs. That's how they celebrated Jesus birthday, and he must have been very glad, for it's as if he is not dead when, in fact, he is.

When we returned to the convent, we saw that the tables were decorated with beautiful flowers. The nuns baked pies and we ate also cookies! On top of that, each of us received warm socks!

"Do you remember, Mamma, how we strolled in the streets, hand in hand, a year ago, and how we looked at all the decorated, lit up windows? This year I see exactly how the Christians celebrate Christmas, for I'm in a convent, but I don't know where you are. A long time ago we saw a falling star, and a big girl said, that if you make a wish at the same time that the star falls- the wish comes true. I wasn't quick enough then, but ever since, I have practiced saying my wish in a flash. Yesterday, when again I saw a falling star, I said quickly: "That Mommy will come back!" What luck I said it just in time, and now I'm certain you will finally come back to me."

In honor of Christmas, we went in the afternoon to the cathedral of Santa Maria, to see the picture of 'the Last Lunch'.

I prayed: "Dear Jesus, today Sister Maddalena showed us a picture book about you. There were many pictures of you from the period when you were a shepherd, with a small black beard and a stick in you hand. You were always surrounded by small children, and you spread out your arms to embrace them all. She said that you are a very good man-God, and that you are full of love that you grant to those who believe in you. I believe in you, and I hope that you love me, too, even though I am a Jew and not yet a Christian; for I, too, dwell under your wings, as Madre said. Maddalena said that you want all little children to be happy. Now that it's Christmas, I want to ask for three wishes:

Uno: that you will bring me back my Mommy!.

Due: that you will stop the war!

Tre: that you will kill all the Nazis and especially Hitler! AMEN!!!

I hope you have a Happy Birthday!"

Then I looked at the picture of the Madonna holding little Jesus in her arms and I thought: to be on the safe side I'll also pray to her. I clasped my hands and whispered: "Dear Madonna, Mother of Mercy, Mother of the son of God, Mother of all creatures. I have already told you once that the Nazis took my mother, and did not bring her back. I'm asking you to help my mother come to me. You have a good face, and because you are a mother yourself, you know how a mother longs for her child. I have already asked your son many times, and he did not yet make the miracle for me. Please, please, have her come back to me, and I'll never forget you for it. You can also bring back my grandmother, but make sure, please, that she won't live with us.

Also make it that Christians and Jews will be friends. Amen!

Happy birthday to you and to Jesus!

Giuditta "

Since the morning we have been bombed endlessly. All the windows shook and Mother Superior decided that it's best to stay in the basement. The nuns carried candles, and we all went down, sticking to the wall. We hardly saw where we were going, and there was a

terrible smell. One girl said, that it's because the air downstairs hasn't moved for hundreds of years. Another girl said, that it's because of the mildew that grows on the walls. I didn't see any mildew, but on the walls I saw huge moving shadows! Emanuela said, that these are our shadows, but I didn't believe her, because how come they are huge and we are small? How can they climb on the wall? Giulietta said that they are ghosts and spirits. "Mommy!!" I looked for Angela. She sat at the other end. I crawled to her, and she made room for me beside her and smiled down at me.

She was in the middle of a discussion: "The people who are bombing us are our Allies, and the Germans are our enemies". Rosalia said: "Excuse me, but you are talking nonsense. How can it be that the people who are bombing us are not our enemies?" "Look, it's both simple and complicated. The dictator, Mussolini, with his Fascists government, joined Hitler and the Germans. At first, the Italians were on the side of the Germans, but finally they got smart, and a year ago, they left the Germans and joined the Allies. Because the Nazis headquarters is in Milan, the Allies bomb Milan. Since we, too, live in Milan, we are being bombed by the Allies." What a mess! I said: "I don't understand what goes on, Angela." She said: "The patriotic Italians, the Partisans, who are in the mountains, are fighting the Fascist and the Nazis, who are in the valleys." -"Who are the Allies?" -"The Americans and the British." -"Then everyone is fighting everyone?" -"Yes, and the Allies are about to win. They have already freed most of Italy, except for Milan and some other cities in Lombardia that are still in the control of the Fascists and the Nazis." -"Angela, before we were on the side of the bad people, and now we are on the side of the good ones?" -"Exactly." -"And who is on the side of the Jews?" -"The Partisans." -"I think that at heart, even the Fascists hate the Germans." -"Generally, the Italians don't like to fight, they like to live, they don't like to die", said Rosalia. -"What's true- is true," said Angela, "and don't worry, the German army will soon collapse."

I saw that the small girls were talking excitedly and I went to sit with them. -"You know, girls, a bomb fell on my uncle's house right through the chimney!" -"Our house, too, got a bomb on its head." -"In our house, the ceiling fell on my parents' bed. Luckily, they went to visit Grandpa." -"At my grandparents, half of the house was gone." -"In our street, no building was left whole." -"The airplanes drop bombs from their bellies, like chickens lay eggs." -"A pity they aren't eggs..." -"Do you hear? BOOM! BOOM!" -"Mommy, I'm afraid!!" -"I wonder if they are American bombs", I said. -"As if it matters from which bomb you die..." -"When the war will die, then peace will live again." -"What's the name of that man of the bad people?" -"Hitler." -"Then I'll let Hitler have it in the teeth!" -"And I'll pull his hair!" We said together: "May his name and memory of him, be erased forever and ever! Amen!!"

It's already the second day in a row that we are being bombed. Mother Superior decided that we wouldn't go up to sleep in our beds. She and the nuns went upstairs to bring us bread and water. We slept on the floor next to one another. It was so coldddd!! If only there was a pause then we could go upstairs... When we woke up, we heard many bombs falling. Mother Superior said that we'd learn in the basement. She brought us papers and pencils. Sister Maddalena taught us to write in Roman numbers, and then she gave us ten

exercises in addition and ten in subtraction. When I finished, I asked her if I could listen to the other classes. She agreed. I went to Angela's class, and sat on the side. Her teacher said: "There is almost no resemblance between the two nations, except for the fact that they are both Europeans. The differences between them are many. You, Marta, will represent the Germans, (Marta made 'a face') and you, Angela, the Italians. (Angela smiled). Each of you will choose four girls. Write on pages the positive and negative characteristics of the two nations. Now, let's hear what you have written, and I'll write on a big page their characteristics, each one opposite the other:

GERMANS

Obedient
Carry orders
Quiet
Depressed
Orderly
Rigid
Hostile
Vengeful
Snobs
Diligent
Take life gravely

ITALIANS

Disobedient
Refuse orders
Loud
Joyful
Disorderly
Easy-going
Friendly
Forgiving
Modest
Negligent
Take life easily

"Very well! Who can find in what they resemble?" - "Both nations are devoted music lovers and the greatest composers were Italians and Germans." - "To our regret their rulers are alike. Both nations have all-powerful rulers with ambitions for far-reaching expansions." - "And the two nations adore their leaders and are ready to follow them with their eyes closed." - "Do you know whom they resemble?" Asked Angela. - "Whom?" - "Don-Quixote and Sancho-Panza!" They laughed. Their teacher said: "To sum it all up, dear girls, we can say that it's hard to find two nations more different from one another. It's hard to understand how they got along for so long and it's quite clear why their bond didn't last." - "It's our good luck", they said.

I asked Angela: "Why are some Italians friends of the Nazis?" She said: "Most Italians are anti-Fascists, especially the Partisans, who are freedom lovers and fight the Germans with great success." - "Then you can first be friends and later on be enemies?!" - "Sometimes yes, when they don't suit each other. The Feuhrer and the Duce think they are Gods, but their bitter end is approaching."

It's our third day in the basement! One can go crazy from all these bombings! We heard distant explosions, then they came closer. We heard a whistle and a strong explosion. We fell back, screaming. Madre said: "Here we are separated from the world outside and protected by our lord Jesus. Fear nothing." We were calmed. (but when will it end?) My friends were still asleep, so I went and sat by Angela. She was talking excitedly with her friends: "I heard that they signed an agreement not to bomb the artistic creations."

"What impudence! They'll bomb people but they won't bomb art?!" -"That's right. It seems that people are not highly regarded like art." -"But man created art, therefore he is more important! Besides, man has a heart and a soul and statues don't." -"Also artistic creations have a soul, a universal soul. Art talks to everyone, wordlessly. That's why everyone relates to it in admiration." -"Then in the world's eyes, art is worth more than people?" "Yes." I asked: "Why don't they love people the way they love art?" -"Maybe because there are many people and only few works of art. Besides, to give birth to another human being, everyone can; but in order to paint a beautiful painting, one needs a talent." "Then someone without a talent isn't valued?" -"Not particularly. What is special is always more admired than the ordinary." -"But man is special, God put life into him." -"And the artist breathed life into the material and put an eternal soul into it." "Very nice indeed! If all the people are killed, who will be left to admire the art and create more art?" -"I don't know, but even if man disappears, art will live forever." I asked: "Who is more talented: God or man?" -"What a question, of course God! He created man and made him eternal like himself, and only because of the original sin, he made him mortal." Marta said: "You said that art is considered more than man; then if man created art, isn't he to be considered more than God, who only created man?" We heard the all-clear siren. "HALLELUJAH!!!" we shouted with joy. We quickly arranged ourselves in pairs and went upstairs. We ran wildly around the yard. How good it is to breathe fresh air! How good it is to be able to run! Long live freedom!

If only the war would end...

Today, as we were studying in the second floor, we suddenly heard shouts from downstairs. We all clung to the windows to see what was going on. We saw two Nazis standing in the yard shouting to us: "Do you have Jewish girls there?" I immediately moved away from the window, but Sister Anna Maria who stood behind me, pushed me back forward and shouted back: "No, we don't have any Jewish girls here!" She told us to return to our seats. I stood paralyzed and looked at her. At first I couldn't say a word, but finally I said: "grazie". She said: "You shouldn't thank me, you should thank Jesus, for He is the one who saved you. He loves you and He wants you to stay alive and be a Christian. If the Nazis would have found out that you are Jewish, they would have taken you to a far away camp, and put Mother Superior in prison for hiding you. Do you wish to thank her?" I said I did. We both went to her. Outside her room the nuns were talking excitedly. Mother Superior came out of her room as pale as the wall. When she saw me, she came over and hugged me (!) Then she said excitedly: "The Nazis questioned me if I was hiding Jews. I swore on Jesus and the Holy Virgin that I wasn't hiding any Jewish girl. (She was even ready to sin for me!) Since they weren't convinced by me, they decided to ask the children, in the belief that children don't lie. When none of the ^{girls} said they saw or knew of a Jewish girl, they left."

Sister Anna Maria told her that I backed away from the window and she pushed me back. Madre caught both Anna Marias' hands and said: "Well done! You did a good deed!" Then she said that she'll go to the Confessing Father to confess, and that they'll all go to the chapel to thank the Lord for his miracle; and that meanwhile I should call Angela and we both should wait for her near her office. I thought: it was very nice of them all not

turning me in. Have they forgotten that I was Jewish? Maybe they never believed me? Maybe they didn't snitch on me because they are good Christians? The Reverend Mother always told me I'll be protected here, and now I see that she was right.

I entered Angela's class. She ran to me: "Giuditta, are you all right? Tell me what happened!" I told her and asked: "Angela, what if they'll come back?" She said: "They have no reason to come back. They were convinced, and we will never turn you in, but you might unintentionally turn yourself in. You almost revealed to being a Jew. You mustn't draw attention to yourself. You must behave like all the other girls and say what all the others say. You must never stand out in any way. Okay?"

Mother Superior came back and invited all the nuns into her room. She said: "We have to decide how to conduct ourselves in the future. Sister Anna Maria, what did you want to say?" -"Reverend Mother, you endangered your life and the lives of all of us, in order to save a Jewish girl. I think the time has come for Giuditta to convert, for her sake and yours." They all looked at me. I thought: I can't be ungrateful. She turned to me: "Today you got your life back as a gift, and that's a sign that you must live your life differently, in the good Christian way, so that you'll be deserving your good fortune." Mother superior said: "I'm almost certain that they won't come back, but just in case they do, we have to give you a good cover. When one saves another from death, it's as if he gives him life.

Today you were born anew, therefore, we'll give you a new name. We'll call you Ditta, which is a Christian shortening of Giuditta, and we'll give you a thorough brain wash."

"What's a brain wash?" -"It means that you wash the brain with words. You repeat certain words over and over again, until you believe in them. Repeat after me word by word: "I am a Christian and my name is Ditta." I said: "I am a Christian and my name is Ditta."

"Angela, you'll repeat with her four times, before and after meals, and at night before she sleeps." Sister Anna Maria said: "Now kiss the cross to show your thanks." I went to the Reverend Mother, crossed myself, kissed her hand and the cross that hung from her neck. (When mother will come, I'll explain to her, and she'll understand like she always did.

Besides, crossing myself will protect me from the Nazis!) Sister Anna Maria said:

"Giu...Ditta, has a big mouth, and she already told everyone that she is Jewish. I suggest, Reverend Mother, that you'll gather all the girls and give them a collective brainwash."

"You are right", said Mother Superior, "there is no other alternative, and may Jesus forgive me for one more lie." I said: "But it's forbidden to lie." They all looked at me in amazement and Mother Superior said: "In certain cases, such as saving a life, you can lie. In order to save you we are all ready to lie." (That's right. When there is no choice, you do awful things, like betraying your own mother!)

Mother Superior gathered all the girls in the dining hall and said: "Dear girls, I sent for you to tell you, that just now I heard from Giuditta's relatives, that her name isn't Giuditta, but Ditta, and that she isn't Jewish, like she mistakenly thought, but a Christian girl like the rest of you. Ditta sometimes likes to make up stories, but she is a little girl and we all forgive her. We will forget her stories and the name she chose for herself, and from now on, we must remember that she is a Christian and that her real name is Ditta. That's all, girls."

She left and all the girls gathered around me. -" Why did you tell us that you are Jewish, ha?" -"I knew all the time that you are a Christian!" -"I also knew, but I didn't want to

say.." -"I told you that she has a Christian belly button!" (So it's the belly button that saved me...) Angela said: "Come, Ditta, I want to show you something", and she gave me her hand and saved me from them. She whispered: "Before the next meal, I'll make you the first brainwash." She winked at me and left.

I thought: I also have to be faithful to God, because he saved me then when he moved my finger towards the Christian neighbor. I must love both of them, so that they won't be jealous of each other, and that they'll both bring me back my mother. I have to find a solution that will satisfy everyone.

I know what! I'll be two girls! During the day, I'll be a Christian girl and my name will be Ditta; but during the night, I'll be a Jewish girl and my name will be Giuditta. This way everyone will be happy: the Reverend Mother, the nuns, Jesus and Madonna- will be pleased that I am a Christian. Mamma, grandmother and God- will be glad that I am a Jew. I'll have to hide the night- time girl, so that the Christians won't know about her. It won't be too difficult, though, because I'll be Jewish in the dark, and no one will hear how I'll brain wash myself saying quietly in bed: "I am Jewish and my name is Giuditta." This way I'll be faithful to Jesus during the day, and to God at night. I'll have good relationship with both of them, and they won't be angry at me.(But now I don't know for sure what I am: a Christian or a Jew or half and half?...))

"Mamma, don't worry. I am not converted yet. Angela told me that only after I'll be baptized, I'll become a Christian. Now I am half and half. Besides, even when I'll be a Christian, it will be only until you come back. If you don't want me to be a Christian for long, then come quickly!" (Now she'll surely come running...)

I am so afraid! Maybe the Nazis weren't convinced and they'll come back? I don't understand, if I covered myself with the blanket over my head - how did fear get into me? It's already several nights that I hardly sleep. At first, I tightened the blanket around me and I whispered three times: "Get away, you disgusting one!" But fear didn't go away. Then I remembered that my mother showed me once how my shadow shrinks; so if it can shrink, why can't I?...I lay curled up at the corner of my bed, so that everyone will think I'm a little ball that someone left in bed, covered with a blanket.

Then I thought that if the fairy will make me invisible, then the Nazis will never find me. But the fairy didn't come. I prayed: "Please, God, kill off the Nazis, so that they won't catch me! Please see to it that they should die!" Finally I went to Angela and told her that I'm afraid and I want to sleep in her bed. She said: "Get into your bed and I'll tell you why you have no reason to be afraid."

When I was in my bed she said: "First of all, at night the Nazis won't come, because in the dark they can't see. Even if they were able to see, what could they see? There are no signs on you that you are Jewish, and you look more German than any of us. You are fair and have blue eyes, while we are as dark as Jews. They will never ever suspect that you are Jewish. Secondly, exactly opposite your bed is hung the cross and it protects you personally. If you like, I have here a picture of the Madonna. Do you want it? Here... put

it under your mattress. Between Jesus and the Madonna, there isn't a chance in a million that they'll come to you."

After a few nights of peace, tonight again fear came out of his corner. I thought: I must conquer this fear. I must! I said: "Dear fear, let's play as if I'm not afraid of you!" -"Okay. How do we play?" -"We'll change places. I'll be you that sits in the corner, and you'll be me that lies in bed." -"Fine. I'll begin: Ho, ho, ho! I'm the black fear! I'm the big fear! Everyone is afraid of me, especially one little girl who hides in her bed." -"That's because I'm a little coward. When I'll be big, and there won't be a war, then I'll stop being afraid." "Ha ha ha! You'll always be afraid of me, because I am big! Because I am a hero!" -"You see, fear, how nice it is to play like this and be good friends?" -"You're right, it's nice. I don't mind having a small girl like you for a friend." -"Great! Then you'll be my big friend and you'll always protect me, right?" -"Sure thing! Tell me, little girl, what's your name?" -"Giuditta." -"I'm pleased to meet you. My name is PAURA." -"Maybe from now on I'll call myself CORRAGGIO?" -"Ha Ha, what a funny girl! Good- night, Giuditta, sorry...CORAGGIO!" -"Good- night, PAURA." (Now I can sleep peacefully.)

Today it rained heavily and there were many thunders. Graziela said: "You know, when many Italians sin- nature becomes terribly angry. In Naples there is a Vulcano called Vesuvio. When he gets angry at the Italians, he explodes, and his anger bursts out like a red lava that burns everything it touches." -"Il Vesuvio also throws up a shower of stones in all directions." -"If they sin more, the earth shakes and many Italians fall into the abyss." How fearful! I never knew that mountains get angry with people. I always thought that the earth is strong and stable! Now I'll try even more not to sin, and I hope that all Italians will do the same.

"Mamma, I wake up at night and call you, but you never come. Why don't you ever come? Why don't you come just once and for all? Maybe you forgot your little girl?...I would so much want to be a baby again, for if I were small, we'll return to live in our home and no one will be able to separate us. You will love me as always and I'll think that the whole world is as good as you..."

Angela told me today: "In five months, I'll pass exams in order to become a novice-nun, and I'll move to the novices room. I'm telling you now, so that you'll slowly get used to the idea." -"I don't want you to move to another room!" -"Don't worry, you'll still see me, I'm not leaving the convent." -"What are those exams you said?" -"I'll have to swear to submit to suffering and poverty, help the needy, and live a life of abstinence." -"What does it mean?" -"It means, that I'll have to give up the pleasures of life; give up a man's love and having his children." -"Ah, you are not allowed to marry! But Jesus you can marry?" She laughed. -"With Jesus it's like marriage. I love the convent, it's an island of purity and peace. I'll never return to the outside world. Never! One day I hope to be a Mother Superior, and gather abandoned children." -"You are fit for it, for you are good and gentle." -"You are not so bad either." (Ha!...)

"Mamma, I all the time talk to you inside me. You hear me, don't you? I tell you everything that happens to me and I behave as usual, so that you will come back to me as usual. Then we will forget everything as if it was a bad dream that we dreamt together."

What an interesting week we had!

At first the Reverend Mother told us that the Cardinal of Milan got a cease-fire between the Italian Partisans and the German army, and that's why they declared a holiday in Milan. We all went to Duomo's piazza to see many Partisans waving red flags and singing beautiful songs. They had colorful scarves and people were throwing flowers on them, shouting: "Long live the Partisans!" Everyone sang with the Partisans and clapped hands. A few days later, a nun told us that the Partisans caught Mussolini who tried to escape, killed him and his lover and hung them with their feet up and their heads down. She said that many Italians went to look at them and celebrate. Mother Superior didn't allow us to go to the railway station to see them, because it's not a sight for children.

A day later a wonderful thing happened: Hitler died!! He exploded under the ground! What joy! The most evil men in the world died one after the other, just as Angela said. GLORIA HALLELUJAH!!

We heard all the city bells ringing at the same time, and we didn't understand why. Mother Superior gathered us in the yard and told us excitedly: The Germans fled! The hand of the Allies is on top! The war is over!!" Yoohoo, how we jumped for joy and cried: "PACE!" "PACE FINALMENTE!" "LA GUERRA E FINITA!"

(Now on one will die anymore, and everyone will return home and so will I!!)

Mother Superior hung up the Italian flag and told us: "We are going to the Duomo's piazza to celebrate!"

We went out and we saw many flags and lots of lights because the blackout was over. Many people streamed to the piazza shouting out: "Long live the Motherland!" "Long live free Italy!"

People sang, drank wine, kissed one another, hugged and some even cried with joy. We, too, sang loudly and hugged. We were all dancing in the streets, even the nuns! One fat man rocked towards us, lifted his glass of wine and cried: "Viva Signorina! Bella Signorina!" We laughed hard and shouted: "Viva!" "Viva!" The music was gay, and all the time all the cathedral bells were ringing and ringing as if they were singing. My heart pounded strongly, and I felt such joy that at long last the good conquered the bad and love conquered hate. Hallelujah!!

We returned very late. We felt like drunkards, and we sang at the top of our voices:

-"Wicked Hitler shot himself!"

-"Mussolini was hanged and Hitler committed suicide! Hurray!"

-"They will be cooked together in the boiling tar! Hurray!"

Only very late at night, when the bells went to sleep, we got into our beds; but I couldn't fall asleep. I thought: finally the danger has passed, and now that the war is over and peace comes, the world will surely change for the better.

"Mamma, now you, too, will be released from there and be free, and even though you are far away you have surely heard that the war had ended. Now you will come to me and we'll return home. Good-night, beloved mother..."

It's Sunday again, and neither my mother nor Stella's came. Stella started to cry. I asked her: "Do you want to play 'Mother and Daughter'?" She asked: "How do we play?" I said: "I will be your mother that is coming to visit you and afterwards you will be my mother that is coming to visit me." - "Great! Will you bring me candies?" - "Sure!"

I picked up three little stones and said: "Hello, Stella, my beloved daughter. How are you? Look what I bought for you", and I gave her the 'candies'. She jumped with joy. I said: "Now you'll be my mother. You don't have to bring me candies, I'll be satisfied with kisses. We'll play like this: at first you'll walk slowly, but when you'll see me, you'll start running to me with open arms, embrace and kiss me." She was thrilled. We played, in turns, many times and we were both very pleased.

"Mamma, now that the war is over, I wait for you more than ever and I think of you all day long. I don't understand why do all the mothers come and only you don't? Why do you let me wait for you so long? I know you didn't leave me for always, but why don't you come back? You that were always ready to do everything for me - can't do the one thing I ask for all the time?... If I'll stop thinking about you and wait for you, will you surprise me by coming? Then from tomorrow on, I won't wait for you near the gate and we'll see what you'll do..."

"I have not waited for you for three days, Mamma, and you still haven't come! I don't know what to think anymore! Just the same, I'll run quickly to the gate to see if you arrive."

I waited and waited by the gate but when it began to rain hard, I ran back into the building. When I entered the dining hall, the tables were set for supper, and all the girls sat as stiff as candles. The nun on duty said: "Now you remembered to come? Look how wet you are too! You won't eat supper! Go upstairs, lie down on your bed and think of what you had done and maybe you'll learn a lesson." - "I won't eat at all?" - "Of course not! You have the nerve to ask! It's time you follow orders without arguments. Go at once!"

I went and lay on my bed and my belly growled dreadfully. She pains me and shouts at me that I don't give her to eat. Doesn't she understand that I don't do it on purpose? She is so stupid! She makes frightening noises, bites me and growls: "Give me food! Quick! I am hungry!"

I got off the bed and walked down the long, dark corridor that was lit, at the end, by candles. Candles! Maybe I'll eat a candle? It does have a strange taste, but my belly is finally full and quiet.

From now on I'll take care not to be late for meals again.

I was so glad that I wasn't in punishment any more and that I'm allowed to eat breakfast, that in my haste I swallowed the bread without leaving a crumb.

Later, while I was playing in the yard, a big girl ran to me and said excitedly: "Ditta, Come quick! Mother Superior wants to see you. You have visitors. A man and a woman are waiting for you!" (A man and a woman?! I don't believe it!!!) I ran as fast as the wind and burst into the room, but I saw there a woman who was a stranger!! I felt faint...

The Reverend Mother came to me: "My child, I see that you are excited. Sit down. You have guests." (What guests! I never saw them in my life!) The man approached me and said: "Shalom. My name is Zvika. I am a soldier in the Jewish Brigade and this is Leah. What's your name?" I said: "Ditta." - "We are Jews. Do you know that you are Jewish, too?" I nodded. They smiled. - "Your real name is Yehudith. As a Jewish girl, you surely know that you don't belong here, that you belong to the Jewish people." The woman said: "We came to take you with us." I shouted: "I won't go! No one will take me!" Mother Superior said: "I told you she won't go with you..." The woman bent towards me and said: "We came from Eretz- Israel, the land of the Jews. We want to take you there, so that you, too, will live among your people."

The Reverend Mother said: "You are very dear to me, my child, I don't want you to go."

The man said: "You know you are not a Christian." The woman said: "There is your home, Yehudith, your people and your relatives." - "My mother too?" - "Ah... We don't know yet where your mother is, but we are all one big family now, and we will see to it that you will lack nothing." Mother Superior said: "Here is your home, Ditta, in Italy, where you were born." The woman said: "I, too, wasn't born in Eretz - Israel, but I immigrated to it, because I am Jewish, and the place of all the Jews is in Eretz- Israel."

The man said: "There you will be free, you won't be imprisoned any more." The Reverend Mother said: "I took care of you with much devotion and I did everything possible in order to save you." The woman said to me: "It's nice of her that she took care of you, but you, Yehudith, are a Jewish girl, and we searched for you everywhere. Now that we finally found you, we won't let you go on living among the Christians, for your place is with us, in Eretz- Israel."

The Reverend Mother said: "I love you, Ditta." (Oooph! Why did they come to bother me? I had it good before they came...) The man said: " We must bring you back to the bosom of Judaism. The Nazis killed almost all the Jewish children. We are very glad you survived. We don't want to lose you, too. Go back to your people, Yehudith." The Reverend Mother said: "Jesus saved your life; in the bosom of Christianity you're protected and safe." The woman said: "She is a Jewish child who was given into your custody; she doesn't belong to you, she belongs to her people!" Then the man said something to the woman in a language I didn't recognize. He turned to mother superior and said: "As we told you before, we have a fund for saving the Jewish children and we are ready to compensate you for taking care of her."

Mother Superior almost shouted: "I don't want your money! I want the child!" The woman said to me: "Yehudith, you found here a temporary shelter. Now that the war is over, we gather all the Jewish children that were hidden in convents, and bring them to Eretz- Israel, so that they should live among their own people. The time has come, Yehudith, to tie your fate again to that of your fellow Jews. Your place is with your people, and not here, in the convent."

Mother Superior said: "Ditta, you must make a very difficult decision. Go upstairs to the small room and think well where you want to be. After half an hour we will call you, and you will tell us what you decided; whatever you decide - will be all right. You may go now." The woman called after me: "Remember, Yehudith, you can choose to be where **you** want." The man said: "And you can return to your Jewish name, Yehudith." As I reached the door the man added: "And there is a wonderful sun there all through the year..."

Suddenly I felt big and important. I went upstairs and thought: they sent me here so that I should decide by myself. But who are these two? They are two people I don't know at all! How do I know that they are not lying? How do I know that they are really Jews? Maybe they are Nazis in disguise? -No, it can't be, I don't feel any danger. -But I don't want to leave the convent, I thought I'd stay here forever, with Madre, Angela and my friends. I feel good here. I feel safe. -But I know I'm Jewish. -Yes, but I'm afraid to go to a far away country and live among people I don't know. -But here, too, I didn't recognize anyone at the beginning... -And there I won't feel different. -But they speak in a strange language, and I'll have to learn everything from the start. -But Mother Superior once said that everything is possible to learn. -But I don't want to leave the convent, I'm afraid of the world outside. -But the war is over and the danger passed, and out there I'll be free again and I'll be able to run barefoot. -But the Reverend Mother loves me... -And my mother loves me most in the world, and yet I didn't choose her. And then it came to me: there, among the Jews, I'll find my mother!!! I am so thrilled that soon I'll meet her!!!

I looked through the window at the cathedral and said: "Good-bye, beautiful cathedral. I found in you beauty and peace, but now I have to take leave of you and of Jesus and Maria, but I'll never forget you." Just then the bells started ringing: "You are saying good-bye to me. Maybe you're echoing in my ears for the last time... time... time..."

One of the girls came and told me to go down. When I entered the room, the three of them looked at me in expectation and when I said: "I have decided to go to Eretz- Israel," the man and the woman smiled, but Mother Superior paled and asked: "Dear Ditta, are you absolutely sure?" I said sadly: "I am sure..."

Mother Superior gathered the girls and the nuns and told them that I'm leaving them because I immigrate to the land of the Jews. The girls surrounded me: "Then you didn't lie, you are really Jewish!" -"I told you she is Jewish!" -"Then you are going to Terra-Santa?" -"What, they speak there in the language of the Bible?" -"What do you know, Ditta will live in the Holy Land!" -"Then across the sea there is a land that belongs to the Jews..."

I searched with my eyes for Angela. I saw her standing by herself at a distance. I ran to her. She embraced me and said: "Maybe we'll meet when I'll be a nun, perhaps I'll be sent to a convent in Gerusalemme..." I said: "I hope so," and gave her a kiss.

A nun brought me a small bag with my belongings. I waved good-bye and they called out: "Ciao Giuditta!" -"Ciao, cara bambina!" -"Buon viaggio!"

I walked between the two Jews. When we arrived at the gate, I suddenly turned back, ran to the Reverend Mother, embraced her and buried my face in her bosom. She took off her chain with the cross, put it around my neck, kissed me on the forehead and said: "Jesus will protect you!" I felt that I had to hide the chain; I put it under the shirt, ran back to the Jews, and we went out through the gate.

We arrived at the railway station. They met there a woman they knew. The woman said: "I see that you succeeded in taking out the child." - "From all the children we have taken out of convents, Yehudith, so far, is the only one who agreed to leave of her own free will, but it wasn't easy to convince her." - "Do you mean to tell me that she wasn't glad to get out of there?!" (What are they talking about me as if I'm not there?...) - "If she hadn't agreed, we would have kidnapped her. (What! I thought that only Germans kidnap children!) Leah would have disguised herself as a nun or pretended to be a relative and would have taken her 'just for an outing' ...Last week, when we wanted to take out a ten year old girl, she shouted: "I won't go with the damned Jews who killed Jesus! I am a Christian!" We had no other choice but kidnap her." - "How is she now?" - "She continues to curse, us and all Jews, but she will get over it. These children's parents were murdered because of their Judaism, and we have no intention to let any Jewish child be raised in the spirit of hate against their own people. We won't allow them to be raised as Christians, denying their religion! Now, after the war, there are few remaining Jews, and the children among them are even fewer. We gather all the Jewish children that were scattered throughout the convents and bring them back to their people, to live in the land of their forefathers where they will get a Jewish upbringing. Our holy mission is to save every single Jewish child. We already saved twenty-three children. Everywhere we encountered opposition, but with money we solved the problem. This Mother Superior, however, couldn't be bought with money. She refused resolutely to surrender the child, until we finally threatened her that we'll involve the Italian authorities."

He turned to me: "Only then she agreed to call you, Yehudith, on condition that she'll hear from you, that you agree to leave the convent and immigrate to Eretz- Israel. She really fought to keep you. I think she loved you." (She's a good sort, Mother Superior. What a pity I had to disappoint her!)

I asked: "Where is Eretz-Israel?" He said that it's across the big sea, and that it's a homeland and a shelter to all the Jews of the Diaspora. I thought: what luck that I left! No wonder my mother didn't come to the convent! She would never have guessed that I was there! Now that I'm among Jews- we will surely meet!

I was brought to a camp surrounded by a fence. They told me that it's temporary, and that soon they'll take me to a place where there are only children.

In the camp I saw, for the first time, many Jews. They look like Christians, but much thinner. They all had hands and feet like sticks and you could see their bones through their skins.

Before Leah left, she introduced me to the two women whose beds were near mine. Their names are Miriam and Esther. After we ate, I asked Miriam why she and the other Jews, fell on the food. She said that's because where they came from, there was no food at all, so now they take care to have enough food for themselves.

Esther said: "You look like a "Shiksa". Are you sure you are Jewish?" So now I dress and undress under my blanket, because I don't want them to see my belly button and my cross. One woman said kidding: "Tell me, child, what are you hiding there- a treasure?" They all laughed. (If they only knew..)

It's odd, that now that I'm among Jews, I wear the Cross; but I'll continue to hide and guard it, for it's a memento of love, and it will protect me from all evil!

Today when I went to fetch the ball that fell near the fence, a Christian boy shouted at me: "You scoundrel Jew! You killed our Lord Jesus!" (He found the one that killed Jesus!...) I said: "Are you an idiot or what? Jesus died long before I was born!" He said: "Don't tell me fairy-tales!" If my friends weren't beside me, I would have shown him the chain with the cross just to see him faint!...I see that there are many Christians that don't follow, at all, in the paths of Jesus.

In the afternoon a woman who came from Palestine, taught us a song in the strange language. It's called: "Rest comes to the Tired." I don't understand a word, but the melody is beautiful and I hum it all the time. I asked the woman: "What sort of a language is Hebrew?" She told me that in Eretz- Israel they don't speak Italian but Hebrew, and even the babies there speak Hebrew. I don't believe it! But if they can speak Hebrew, I'll speak it too!

Everyone here talks about the horrible things that happened There. They don't say what happened, but I understand it was the worst place in the world. When I ask Miriam about that place she says: "Believe me, it's better for you not to know. Even if you knew everything, you won't understand anything." I asked: "How come?" She said: "You won't understand because you won't be able to grasp it. It's difficult for an adult to understand, much more so for a child." I asked Esther and she said: "It's best not to know too much, if I were you, I wouldn't ask."

There is here a family of a Rabbi and his wife and three children, they don't mind that another child comes to bother them. The Rabbi's wife said: "The Christians hate the Jews because they need a scapegoat." The Rabbi said: "Yes, the Jews were persecuted throughout the course of history".('History' must be a very long course..)

I asked: "The Crematoria is like the boiling tar?" They looked at each other. Their oldest son said: "Tell me, child, where in the world do you live? Don't you know anything?!" His father said to him: "It's best for her not to know"...

The most terrible thing happened to me!

I was playing in the yard with a group of children. We were running around wildly and suddenly the lock of the chain opened and it fell off! The children gathered around the chain in amazement. A big boy asked in a frightening voice: "Whose chain is it?" I was terrified to admit that it was mine and I kept silent. When no one answered, the big boy picked it up and said: "I'm going to throw it far away!" I cried: "No, don't!" and burst into bitter tears. The big boy said: "Aha, this is your chain!" He hit me and said: "Don't you know that you are not supposed to wear the cross?!" He swung around and threw it over the fence and it fell into the bushes on the other side. His hitting me hurt, but in my heart it hurt more that he threw away the chain which was so dear to me, because it was a

memento from the Reverend Mother, who had blessed it, and because I believed that Jesus will protect me as long as I wear it. Now I'm afraid that no one will protect me any more!

In the middle of the night I woke up and cried. What a lousy world! Everyone hates everyone! The Christians hate the Jews, the Jews hate the Christians and they all hate me! Esther came to my bedside: "Yehudith, you know, the boy hit you because the Christians killed his parents. You are crying because of the chain? You must understand that the chain with the cross that you hid tied you to the Christian world, and you would have had to break that bond in any case. It's like the umbilical cord that tied you once to your mother and the doctor cut off the link between you. (It's better not to get tied to anyone, because in the end you are being separated by force and it hurts terribly!) Stop crying. There are worse things in this world. After all, it's only a chain." She stroked my hair: "It will pass- everything passes..."

Leah came, as she had promised, and took me to a big house in the mountains. We are here more than a hundred Italian children, who had all been in convents. We have six counselors: four soldiers from the Brigade and two women counselors.

The counselor of my small group is Eugenia. She told us that she was born in Milan, and that she and all her family had been saved, because they hid in a small village in the mountains.

Eugenia takes us every day on nature's tours, and tells us the names of all the flowers. She allows us to run and wade, barefoot, in the streams. I love it best when we climb high up in the mountain, and when I look down- the people below look like ants. We walk far and arrive at two waterfalls. We spray water on one another and on Eugenia; she laughs at us and we laugh with her. After we eat sandwiches and rest, she says: "Close your eyes, children, and listen to nature's music: to the birds, to the waterfalls and to the whispering wind." I lie on the ground with closed eyes and I listen to the sounds. Then Eugenia says: "Breathe in deeply, children, the air, the peace and the flowers." My eyes are still closed, but through my lashes, I see the cabins and the snow on top of the mountains.

Suddenly Eugenia says: "Children, get up, it's time to learn!" We shout: "No, no, we don't want to!" and we fly from her like birds... We run to the woods and Eugenia says: "Look how the light and shadow play, and how the wind dances the leaves." We say: "Look Eugenia, we dance with the wind!" she says: "Isn't life beautiful, children?"... When it gets dark she says: "Look up at the sky. When the sun sets behind the mountains and the sky is pink and red, then it's time to go back."

When we arrive we sing: "We are Bringing Peace to You", and the big children smile at us and say: "Listen how the rowdy kids sing"... We enter the classroom, and Eugenia tells us to act as if we were statues. Then four of us become trees, four become a bridge, and I and Gaio become waterfalls. We hold hands and dive from the table with a lot of noise.

We play games and dance and sing, all through summer. Matilda, the other counselor, said to Eugenia: "Would you believe it! Two months ago they were shut up in convents, and now, look at them, they are singing like birds and dancing like butterflies!..."

Many older children arrived from camps from other countries, and there was no more room for all of us, so we all moved from the big house into a palace, high up in the mountains. We were told that It's a Roman palace that Mussolini had built for Fascist youth, and now that it's empty, it was decided that we, the Jewish children, would live in it.

I love it here, because we are now the closest to the sky! The palace is very beautiful: tall, broad, it has curved marble steps, the floor is also made of marble like in church, and it has two wonderful surprises: a movie theatre and an indoor swimming pool! In addition there are so many rooms, that I get lost all the time.

Around the palace there is a huge garden with flowers, a grove of trees and pebbled paths. What annoys me is that here, too, there is a locked gate, with a gate- keeper named Angelo. He is a Christian and he lives near by. During the week it's forbidden to get out, but on Saturdays, Moshe, the principal, allows us to go out, with the counselors, and stroll to the village below.

The food here is rationed as usual, and, although we live in a palace, we are not princes!...

I have a chest of my own in which I put all my belongings: my boots, hat and umbrella, the postcard of the Madonna and my first tooth in its little box. Many children here were starved in the camps, and they hide the bread in the chests or under their mattresses because they are afraid that they might not get more bread. The counselors try to convince them not to keep bread because it gets dry and there is always fresh bread, but the children are not convinced and they keep hiding it.

It's so cold here in the mountains, but every morning we have to get up, put on our shorts and undershirts and do gymnastics outside! Reuven, the black haired soldier who is also the sports counselor, passes through the rooms with a hand bell and shouts: "Get up quickly! Wash your faces and hands!" We cry: "The water is ice cold!" He says: "No pampering! It's very healthy, kids!"

In the yard we hold a morning formation, raise the flag and sing the hymn. I love to see the white and blue flag with the Magen David in the center, waving high above everyone. Then Reuven makes us do morning exercises. I don't understand, why do we have to do our exercises outside when we have a big exercise hall inside?! I know why. They tell us it's because we have to become immune to the cold. It's true they are commanders in the Brigade, but we are not soldiers!

Thank God, after that we go in for breakfast. We sit quietly until Moshe says: "Good-appetite". There is some bread or a role with jam and sometimes cereal. When the meal is over, everyone goes to work or to study. The older children are in charge of cleaning, cooking sewing, gardening and doing the laundry, while the counselors supervise them. They also learn Hebrew from their counselors. We, the little ones, have to make our own beds and learn the 'Aleph-Beth' and some arithmetic. Since Eugenia is Italian like us, she doesn't know Hebrew, but when we will be older, we will learn it too.

In the afternoon we play in the yard and in the garden and we engage in sport activities. After supper we dance or hear stories about the Israelis pioneers. When it's time for lights out, we are so tired, that we immediately fall asleep.

I met here more girls that were hidden in convents. At first, their chains with crosses were hung in open view and no one hit them. When the girls continued kissing them, the children from the camps became annoyed with them and tried to persuade them to take them off. All the girls, except one, hid them. I asked a girl who was hidden in a convent in Venice: "You really don't want to be a Jew?" She said: "During the war I made a vow that if I'll stay alive I'll remain a Christian forever, and a vow has to be kept, but don't tell anyone."

Not far from my bed, stands the bed of a girl who came from a convent in Verona. I saw that she hid the cross under her mattress, and every night she took it out secretly, knelt before it, kissed it and cried. I didn't tell anyone, but yesterday a big girl caught her in the act and said angrily: "What are you doing? It's time you became a Jew!" The girl said: "I'm not a Jew! I was taken out of the convent by deception. I love Jesus and I'll never forget that Jesus and Maria saved my life!" -"You are not a Christian! You are a Jew that was hidden in a convent, and Jesus and Maria are long dead and can't save anyone." She cried: "That isn't true! They saved me!" I said: "She is right. I was also in a convent and I was also saved by Jesus." We argued for a long time.

Today a group of big children from Poland arrived. When they saw Silvia wearing the cross, they became very angry. They went to her, with an Italian boy who speaks Yiddish, and said threateningly: "If you won't take off the cross- we will pluck it from around your neck and slap you, too. Take it off immediately or we will all ban you, you "goya"! She took it off, gave it to Eugenia and told her in Italian: "I'll come later to take it back."

I saw that all the soldiers from the Brigade have Star of David on their uniforms. I hope someone will give me a Star of David on a chain to protect me.

I love Friday night. We spread white sheets on the long tables and put wild flowers in many little cans. There are Sabbath candles, everyone is clean, we all wear white shirts and sing Sabbath songs. On top of it all, we eat soup and we get an extra roll!

Many soldiers from the Brigade like to spend the Sabbath with us. From all the soldiers who come, the soldier we call 'Uncle Moshe,' is the best of them all. When he arrives, we all hang on him as if he is a tree and he never complains. He brings us tasty leftovers from parties and food that he confiscates from the battle rations of his soldier friends. Best of all, he has wide pockets full of candies and cookies for us!

Yesterday when he came, he put me on his back like a bag and called out: "Who wants to buy a bag of flour? Today it's cheap! Today it's cheap!" -"I " -"I", answered the children. -"How much do you offer? Only a thousand Lirettas? That's all?! No! I won't sell! The sack of flour remains mine. Only mine!"

We, the Italians who came out of convents, don't understand the Polish and Hungarians, who came from the camps, for we don't speak the same language; but the dancing and the singing create a link between us.

Moshe, the principal, plays the piano beautifully, conducts a choir of children and teaches us folk dancing. I love the 'Horah' best, because you swirl in a circle until you fall 'dead'. A few days ago was 'Rosh-Hashanah'. Moshe explained to us about the holiday in three languages: in Hebrew, in Italian and in Yiddish. Many Brigades soldiers came to visit and told us how beautiful Eretz-Israel is. They said that in Eretz-Israel there are also beautiful high mountains, almost like the Alps, and that the Israelis, who are called Sabres, are very tall, too.

Moshe, the principal, comes from a Kibbutz, and he tells us about the hard life in the Kibbutz and he says it's also a very good life because of the mutual help and sharing there. He says: "After all the hardships you went through, you finally have here a normal life setting. Soon you won't be exilic Jewish children any more. In your new homeland you'll all be active and productive. I'm giving you training and teaching you to live a shared life for your future life in a Kibbutz. Forget your past and traumatic memories and think only of the future. You'll need all your time and strength to be absorbed in your new homeland and be ready for the difficult life that awaits you there. You won't lick honey there, but you will be free, as one is free at home."

Last Friday, when 'Uncle Moshe' came, I asked him to look for my mother when he'll go back to Milan, and go to my convent and ask Mother Superior if my mother had been there.

Today, as soon as he arrived, he came to me and said that he hasn't yet found my mother and that she hadn't been in the convent, but Mother Superior was very glad to hear from me and was surprised that I hadn't yet sailed to Palestine. She sent a message that she hasn't forgotten me and that she thinks of me often.

I became friendly with an Italian boy a little older than I, who had been hiding in a Monastery in Milan. His name is Aaron. I asked him: "Who died on you?" He said: "My parents and my brother. Who died on you?" I said: "no one." -"Then why are you here?" -"Because I'm waiting for my mother to come back from far away." -"What about your father?" -"I don't know what's with him, I don't know him." -"How come?" -"That's how it is."

Aaron said that in his monastery, the monks treated him badly, hit him and starved him many times for nonsensical reasons. Since then he never feels full, and that's why he filches food from the storeroom. He asked: "Do you want to be my partner?" -"What do I have to do?" -"You have to filch food, of course." -"But that's stealing and it's a sin." -"That's not stealing. A thief is someone who comes in the middle of the night to a stranger's house, and steals with gloves on. I filch from us during the day, and I don't wear gloves. I only

take food without permission, that's all." -"What will God say?" -"He won't say anything, he won't know." -"He knows everything!" -"How does he know?" -"He sits up in the sky above the clouds and sees all that is done." -"Don't tell me fairy-tales." -"I swear! He follows everyone and knows everything!" -"Even if He does, we are little children and it doesn't count." -"But I don't want to filch..." -"Then you'll stand on guard. If you'll see someone coming- whistle or sing." -"Okay, I'll sing Santa Lucia." But I didn't have to sing because no one came, and Aaron gave me half a roll and four candies from the loot...

Yesterday I told Angelo, the guard, that my mother is on the way and I said: "Please leave the gate open at night, so that my mother can get in." -"I can't leave the gate open, but I'll sleep near the locked gate and if she'll come- I'll run immediately to wake you up." "'Bene'. My bed is on the third floor, the fourth room to the right, on the left side of the door." -"Sure thing. You can sleep peacefully."

I asked Aaron: "Are you really not afraid of God?"

- "I don't believe there is one."

- "Of course there is!"

- "How do you know?"

- "Everyone says."

- "If I'll see him- I'll believe, if not- not."

- "I only hope you won't suffer for not believing in him, because he can be against you. You shouldn't sin, otherwise, in hell, you'll be cooked in a huge pot."

- "This is convent nonsense."

- "Even the Jews say that He gives prizes to the good and punishments to the bad."

- "Look, Judith, in order to have it good in life, you have to filch, these are the rules.

Don't worry so much about what will happen after you die, take care that you are not taken advantage of while you live."

There is a girl here called Halinka. She is older than me, very beautiful and very lucky, because sometime ago her mother found her and they are so happy. I and everyone else are jealous that she has a mother. Halinka and her mother have a problem, though, because Halinka wants to immigrate to Eretz-Israel with us, but her mother wants to live in Milan with Halinka. We'll see which of them will persuade the other.

Today Halinka's mother came from Milan to visit her. I went and stood beside her. She asked: "What's your name, child?" I said: "Judith." -"Where were you during the war?"

"In a convent." -"What? In a convent?!" Halinka said: "Mamma, there are many children here from convents and they even have crosses." -"You, too, Judith?" -"Not any more."

"Did you wear a cross?" -"Yes." -"How was it there?" -"Fine." -"How do you feel here?"

"Good." -"You, too, want to immigrate to Palestine?" -"Sure."

I asked her: "Maybe, by chance, you saw my mother in Milan?" -"What's her name?" "Anna." -"What does she look like?" -"She's a little taller than you, she has brown eyes and long black hair. If you see her, tell her that I'm here waiting for her to come and take me." -"I promise I'll keep my eyes open." -"Grazie."

When my mother will come, I'll go with her with my eyes closed, to wherever she wants to go, for wherever she is- there is my home.

Aaron said today: "You know, Judith, I found out that many big boys filch. Today I met three in the storeroom. They sneak out preserves, and trade them in the village for chocolate." -"If everyone filches, then, at the end, nothing will be left in the storeroom!" "Don't worry, 'Uncle Moshe' will bring more supply. Ah, before I forget. There is a Polish boy who sleeps next to me, who wants to be our partner. He'll help me to filch and we'll have more food." -"Does he speak Italian?" -"Only a few words, but for filching it will do." -"Okay, we'll have him join us and we'll be a 'Banda.'" -"Great! From tomorrow we'll be three and we'll be rich! (From your mouth to God!)"

Today we have three rolls, so let's sneak into the village. There is a photographer there, who agrees to make a photograph of you if you give him two rolls. First he'll take my picture, and if you'll give him one roll on account, he may agree to take your picture, if you'll bring him the second roll tomorrow." -"How will we get out of the gate?" -"I'll give Angelo candies and he'll let us out."

Angelo agreed, but he told us to return quickly and if we are caught, we shouldn't tell on him. We promised him.

We descended running to the village. In the middle of the village we found the photographer's shop. We said "Buon giorno" and the photographer said: "Two rolls for a snapshot. Who is going to be first?" Aaron gave him two rolls and was photographed. The man asked: "What about you?" I said: "I have only one roll, but tomorrow I'll bring you another one." He said: "No! Two rolls or no picture!" Aaron tried to convince him but the photographer didn't give in. If tomorrow Aaron won't get two rolls for me, then I won't eat my roll and I'll persuade Aaron not to eat his, and then I'll have two.

On the way back, when we started climbing the steep mountain, all of a sudden we heard a noise of an engine behind us. It was 'Uncle Moshe's' pick-up truck! We ran quickly to hide behind a tree when we heard him say: "Come here, you rascals. Don't be afraid. I might even give you something tasty to eat." We ran to him. He said as if to himself: "I know these rascals from somewhere ...I wonder from where...I think they went for a stroll without permission. Yes, definitely without permission... but because they are little cuties, I think I'll take them on my pick-up truck, if they'll promise me on their oath, never to go out again on their own." We promised. We got on the truck and he asked: "Are these, by chance, good children who love chocolate?" -"Yes", "yes", we shouted. He took out of his pocket a bar of chocolate, divided it between us, and patted our heads.

If anyone will dare say that 'Uncle Moshe' isn't the best man in Italy- Aaron and I will punch him!

Yael and her brother lived with their mother during the war, but when the mother wanted to get married, she brought them to us. After some time their father returned from the camp, after everyone had thought that he was dead. Yael and her brother didn't recognize him, because he had changed, but he claimed that he was their father and he wanted to take them. All of a sudden their mother appeared, and she wanted to take the children too. Yael and her brother are very confused, and now there is a trial going on between the parents. We too talk of them all the time:

- "Now she remembered to come? Where had she been all the time?"

- "Why did she hand them over? What, they are parcels you store?"

- "That's because her new husband didn't want ready-made children."

- "This one, she doesn't at all care about her children. She only wants the father not to have them."

- "The poor father! He finally got out of the camps, and then he discovered that his wife married another and his children don't want him!"

- "The children are more miserable! They have a mother who doesn't love them, and a father that they don't love!"

- "On top of that, they don't want to leave us, for they want to immigrate to Eretz-Israel." What a mess! At the end the court ruled that the father would have the children. Yael and her brother cried a lot, but they had no choice and they left with him.

Matilda, the counselor, came to me and said: "I want to ask you a question, but first I want to explain something. You know that nineteen of our Italian children were adopted by Jewish Italian families who lost their children in the war." - "What is to adopt?" -

"Usually, when a couple doesn't have children, they take a child without parents so that together they'll be a family. Today a very nice couple from Florence came, and they very much want to adopt you. They had a girl who was killed by the Nazis, and they want to adopt a boy or a nice Italian girl like you." - "I don't want to be 'in place of', and I have a mother, and I want to immigrate to Palestine with all the others!" - "Are you sure you don't want to be adopted?" - "Of course I'm sure, and I am not an orphan!"

I saw Sofia and Luigi and told them what happened. Then Sofia told us that now she, too, feels like a Jew, and she won't wear her cross in full view, anymore. Suddenly Aaron came running and breathlessly said: "I'm so glad I see you! I came to say good-bye. I am leaving. I am being adopted!" - "Wait a minute! Don't you want to immigrate with us to Eretz-Israel?" - "You don't understand! It's an opportunity for me! They are nice and rich and they'll give me everything I want and I'll never be hungry again!" - "Well, at least you won't have to filch..." - "You were an ironclad partner, Judith. Ciao!" - "Ciao, Aaron, and good-luck!"

So that's it. I lost my partner and lots of food...

"Do you know, children, Matilda is getting married and is leaving us."

- "But why would she want to leave us? Counselors shouldn't get married!"

- "What a clown! Everyone can marry whenever they want."

- "Maybe she wants to make babies..."

- " Why would anyone want new children? Isn't it better to love the old ones?"
- " That's right. We are her children, she doesn't need more."
- " And she shouldn't be an individual's mother. She should be a collective mother!"
- " You are all prattling. If we like it or not, she'll marry her Max and we will never see her again."

A long time ago I went to Moshe, the principal, to talk to him. He said: "Remind me your name". .. -"Yehudith." -"What's the matter, Yehudith?" -"I heard two big boys whispering that they will sail first. Why children who came after me are sailing to Palestine before me?!" -"So that's it! Do you have any relatives in Palestine?" -"No, I don't." -"Well, it's like this: whoever has a relative in Palestine- sails first, and you and other kids without relatives, will sail with the next group." -"What! I have to be punished because I have no relatives?!" -"Of course not. It's ..." -"They promised to take me to Palestine, otherwise I wouldn't have left the convent!" -"They promised and we'll keep the promise, it's only a matter of time."

Today, in the middle of a game, I was called to Moshe's room. When I entered he said: "Shalom, Yehudith. Remember our little talk? Well, it looks like they heard you in heaven. We received unexpectedly one certificate that belonged to a man who became suddenly ill. We decided to give it to you. The problem is that you'll have to sail by yourself, without any of the children you know. If you don't want to- we'll give the certificate to someone else".(What should I do: leave or stay?...)

- " What about the other children?"

- " They'll sail when again there'll be vacant seats. It might take a long time, though." (Maybe my mother sailed to Eretz-Israel already? Maybe she's waiting for me?...)

- " All right. I'll take it."

- " Good. Then be ready to leave immediately. Take your belongings and say good bye. Don't worry, there will be someone to look after you on the ship, and Leah will welcome you in Palestine."

I'm sad to leave everyone and I'm sorry I didn't see counselor Eugenia, she surely would have given me a kiss... I said to every one I saw: " Goodbye and see you soon in Eretz-Israel!" Then I looked at the mountains all around me and I quietly said: "Hope to see you again one day!"

When I went out of the gate, I shook Angelo's hand. He smiled and said: "Ciao, dolce bambina" and waved. When I looked back, he was still waving, until he faded into a small dot and I couldn't see him anymore...

I was brought by Reuven to a temporary camp near the port. He told me that in a few days I will sail to Eretz-Israel. I was housed in a long shack, together with older girls and women. There is only one girl here who is about my age, but she behaves in a strange way; all day long she lies in bed with her face to the wall. I asked her if she wants to play with me but she didn't answer. Her aunt, Leah, came to me and said that her niece's name is Esther and that she is in depression ever since her mother and three sisters were murdered in front of her eyes. She asked me to talk to Esther, because Esther stopped talking to her. She said: "Maybe because you are of the same age, she'll talk to you." I said: "I have already asked her a question and she didn't answer, but I guess I can try again."

I said: "Shalom Esther, I'm Judith. Do you also immigrate to Palestine?" She said "yes", very softly. -"You will see that it will be good there for all of us." -" It will never be good for me. Only when I'll die I'll have it good." -" If you'll die, you will feel bad." -"You don't understand anything! If I'll die, I'll be with my family. Now they are together and I am here all by myself." -"But you are not alone. We are all here like one big family." -"Don't make me laugh. It doesn't even resemble a family!" -" But when you'll grow up, you'll have a family of your own." -"Really? That they'll will come and kill them too?... " - "They won't kill again." -"They always kill. Always! Go now. I'm tired..."

I told the aunt that I didn't succeed. She said: "It's a good start. I am very glad she talked to you. Maybe we'll delay our departure and I'll take her to a doctor here. Maybe he'll be able to cure her."

In the afternoon a mother and her nine year old daughter arrived in our shack. The mother was pulling her daughter along, while her daughter was screaming at her:" You are not my mother! My mother had curly hair and she was fat. You are all skin and bone and you have no teeth and no hair! I won't go with you!" and she ran and hid under a bed. Her mother pleaded with her to come out but the girl shouted:" I don't want you! I want my real Mommy!" She sobbed. Her mother sat at the corner of the bed and cried softly. Leah went over to her, embraced her shoulders and whispered something in her ear. Meanwhile the girl climbed out, ignoring her mother. Leah said to her:" Your mother's hair will grow back and in time she'll grow fat. Eventually you'll both be fine, you'll see"...

The girl went outside and the mother followed her. Leah said: " It's heart-breaking...Poor mother, to be rejected like that by her own daughter..."

If my mother will come, I'll go with her, no matter what, and I'll love her in spite of her looks. But I can understand why the girl is so disappointed...

Tomorrow we'll sail. I'm sure it will be wonderful to sail on a ship! I'm so excited that I can't fall asleep. Suddenly I saw the girl next to me, get up from her bed, stretch her hands forward and walk straight ahead. Two girls woke up and followed her. The girl went out of the shack and they went after her. I got up and followed them. In the light of the moon I saw that she was older than I. One of the followers said to the other: "You think it will be wise to wake her?" The other answered: "No, its dangerous to wake up a moon-struck, it can cause her shock. I'll touch her gently and take her back to her bed." She touched her lightly on the shoulders and turned her around. The girl kept walking stiffly until she

entered her bed. I went over to the girls and asked: "What is a moon-struck?" They said: "Go to your bed!" I said: "No, first explain to me." One girl said: "A moon-struck is someone who walks in her sleep as if she is awake, but not entirely." -"How did she become like that?" -"The Nazis killed her twin sister and she gets up at night to look for her, and it's forbidden to wake her up."

"Mamma, I hope so much I'll see you as soon as I'll arrive in Eretz-Israel! I remember so well our last day in Milan before it all happened. We went shopping and you bought me a beautiful soft, blue hat, a colored umbrella and white boots. I gave you my hand and we went walking in the rain and you laughed because I entered every puddle on the way. Then we sat on a bench in the boulevard and watched the gray clouds. They were so beautiful..."

When we stood in line to go up on the ship, there was a clerk with a pencil that filled forms. In front of me stood a couple with two children. When my turn came, the clerk asked: "Do you belong to them?" I said: "No." -"Whom do you belong to?" -"I belong to no one." -"What do you mean?" -"I don't have anyone. I belong to myself." -"Ah, you must be the little girl from Salvino! If so, then family Levi, who were ahead of you, will be your 'family' for the duration of the sailing." He introduced me to them and told them to keep an eye on me. They promised. They have a girl my age and a son much older. Everyone went up on deck. I felt excited when I boarded the ship but there was an awful crush. Everywhere people stood or sat on suitcases or parcels. I grabbed a place next to the rail and looked down on the water. It was bluer than the sky. At first, a small tugboat tugged us. On the side of the ship I saw white foam. It began to get dark. I looked at the shore and said in my heart: "Good-bye, Italy. I'm sailing to my new homeland, but I won't forget you. One day I'll come to visit you. Arrivederci!"

Someone gave me dry matzos and a glass of water. Everyone went down but I didn't want to be crushed, so I stayed on deck and looked at the distancing lights. Finally I went down. People were lying on boards, one next to the other. For me and for two youngsters there were no boards; ~~so~~^{we} were given hammocks. My hammock was hung low and everyone who passed by, bumped into it. It annoyed me very much. The 'nice' couple took very good care of their children, but they forgot all about me!

I see that I'll have to look out for myself, for if I'll rely on others- nothing will be left for me...

In the morning I went on deck. I hate the swaying of the ship! I'm glad that the couple doesn't pay any attention to me. It's nice to be without close watch and be free, but I feel so lonely...

There are people here from many countries and I hear many languages. I feel out of place here among all these strangers I don't know. Why did I leave Salvino? Why didn't I stay with all the children? If I hadn't been so impatient, I would have sailed with all my friends and then I wouldn't have felt so lonely here. I also miss Eugenia. She was always nice to me and always kissed me good night. I don't know a soul here. Who knows how long this sailing will be! What if Lea won't wait for me in Eretz-Israel? What if she'll miss me in the

crowd?... I walked on deck feeling miserable. Then I thought: maybe my mother is on board the ship?? I wandered around searching women faces, but I didn't find her anywhere. God, I miss so much my mother and also Madre and all the people I left behind. What am I doing here all by myself? Nobody cares about me... Suddenly a boy came to me and asked me in Italian if I want to play "hide and seek". He told me his name is Giuseppe and that he was here with his father. We found two Italian boys our age and we played for hours. All day long I stayed on deck. I can't stand the smell downstairs.

The four of us climbed up a rope ladder that hung on the mast. A sailor saw us and spoke to us in funny Italian: "Children no have brains in heads, do foolish things to climbing where dangerous is and can fall children, and Traachh! Boomps! No more children!" We laughed.

Giuseppe introduced me to his father. He is very nice and has also green eyes like Giuseppe. (Where is my father? Once, when my mother sat me on her bike, I asked her: "Mommy, where is Daddy?" She said: "Your father is far away," and I felt that she didn't want me to ask her anymore...). We were handed salty meat and more matzos. I was very thirsty but we were given very little water. A pity we can't drink sea water...

I stood with Giuseppe by the rail. He told me that down deep in the sea, there are sunken ships, wild fish and sunken German submarines. What a fright! The sea looks quiet and beautiful, yet it hides frightening secrets! Giuseppe told me of pirates and of the British who are like modern pirates. His father told us that our ship is the last one that sails legally; after us, the British won't allow Jews to sail to Palestine without special permission.

In the evening Giuseppe's father hung my hammock much higher, put me into it, and thank God, no one bumped into me anymore.

On board the ship there are a few Partisans. I and Giuseppe went to the amputee and asked him what had happened to him. He told us that he was wounded in his hand when he attacked the Germans, and the doctor had to amputate his hand. Instead of his hand he has a metal glove. He said: "Because you are cute, I'll give you an orange that I got as a present when I boarded the ship." He took an orange out of his bag and peeled it with his metal glove! He gave each of us four sections. It was delicious! Then he introduced us to his friend, who has only one finger left on his right hand. His friend told us that he blew up a bridge, derailed a train and burnt a German plane. Yoohoo, what heroes!

Today we got six biscuits. I nibble their corners and eat them slowly. There isn't much food because there are so many people on board.

Giuseppe told me that his mother was killed, and he asked me about my parents. I told him what I knew, and that I have no idea how my mother will ever find me! He said: "I have an idea! Let's send her a note in a bottle and Neptune will bring it to her. You'll write to your mother that you're on the way to Eretz-Israel, put the note in a bottle, throw it to the sea, and Neptune will bring it to her." I asked: "Who is Neptune?" He said: "He is the king of the sea." I said: "But I don't know how to write, and I don't have a bottle." He

said: "I know how to write, and the bottle I'll filch from the Rabbi; he keeps a bottle of wine, to say "Lehaim" when we'll reach Eretz-Israel."

Giuseppe filched the bottle when no one noticed. I poured the wine into the sea, and Giuseppe wrote what I told him: "Mamma! I'm on my way to Eretz-Israel. Come with father to look for me. I love you. Judithline." I drew a Magen David on the corner. Giuseppe put the note into the bottle, put on the stopper and I threw the bottle with an arch into the sea. We swore on oath that we wouldn't tell our secret to anyone.

I had nausea from the rolling of the ship and I lay down on the deck. I must have dozed off because suddenly Giuseppe's father shook me and said: "Come quickly to put on a saving belt. The ship is about to sink!" He pulled me after him and we went to two sailors who handed out safety belts. They helped me put one on, and they explained that if we are about to drown- the belts will help us float on the water until we will be saved.

The storm was terrible. Huge waves washed over the deck and took with them suitcases and bags. Oh my god! The sea must have got drunk from the wine I gave him! What had I done! He is rocking the ship, the drunkard! Because of me, we will all drown! I threw up and cried: "Mommy! Mommy!" Giuseppe's father came like a savior, and held my forehead while I vomited. Everyone prayed: "Shma Israel!" The capitano came and shouted: "Why are you all standing like dummies on one side? The ship will surely sink because of your weight! Separate immediately into two groups and stand on the two sides of the ship!"

After a long time the sea calmed down and the ship steadied and didn't sink. What a relief! We returned the safety belts and Giuseppe said: "Father, it was a miracle from heaven!" Now the sea is quiet as if nothing had happened.

I'm fed up with this sailing! I want to feel the ground again! This sea is so annoying. He is nice and quiet now, but he can suddenly behave like someone crazy. Giuseppe told me that from one bottle of wine one doesn't get drunk so quickly. That means that he is just a plain mad sea with moods that change every minute.

I asked Giuseppe's father: "If the sun sinks when the sea is stormy, will she drown?" He laughed and said: "Not a chance!"

Suddenly I heard shouts: "Look! There are little lights in the distance- it's Eretz- Israel!!!" We all clung to the rails. Yes, it's a mountain with little houses scattered on it. There was a tremendous joy. Everyone embraced and wept. The Rabbi said a blessing and asked: "Where is the wine? Who saw the wine?... Oh, well, never mind now. Let's sing, people!" We sang the hymn and then we shouted: "Long live the people of Israel!" "Long live the land of Israel!"

A landing boat came and carried us over to the shore in groups. Land at last! I turned towards the sea and said: "Goodbye sea, and thank God, I will not be seeing you again!"

I looked around for my mother, but I didn't see her...

We rode on buses and many people stood in the port, cheered us and threw candies and packages of biscuits at us. Some candies hit me on the head. I picked up six candies.

Giuseppe's father caught a package of biscuits and we shared the loot.

We were brought into a long shack and we were given sandwiches and drinks. Suddenly I heard my name in a loudspeaker. I went with Giuseppe and his father towards the voice and who stood there? Leah who took me out of the convent! I was so glad to see a familiar face! She asked: "How was the trip?" I said: "The important thing is that it's over..." She told me she is taking me to a nice boarding-home. I embraced Giuseppe and his father and said: "Thank-you very much for everything and I hope to see you again".

Yesterday I arrived at "Tchia.", the boarding home in Petach-Tiqva. The counselor who met me is called Tova and she knows a little Italian. When we arrived, many children who surrounded us, asked: "Who is she? What's her name?" Tova said: "This is the new girl and her name is Judith." They asked me: "Do you know Hebrew?" I showed with my hand a sign of 'a little' and said: "'Un poco.'" One boy said: "Ah, 'Italiano', we have here a few Italians."

We went up to the upper floor. Tova said: "You'll sleep in the small-children's room because you are small, and your bed is the one near the window." She brought me a new dress and underwear and told me to change. Five girls looked at me and I didn't want to undress, because I was afraid they'll see my belly button. I moved my head from right to left. Tova said: "Today I'll allow you to undress behind the curtain, but tomorrow you'll undress like all the other girls."

In the evening when the girls showered, I deliberately went in. What joy! All the girls' belly buttons were sunken in! So Marcella fooled me and I am Jewish after all! I am so glad!!

After breakfast Tova said: "Come, I'll introduce you to some of the children your age." We went out and coming towards us were two brothers. The little one was very cute but the older one was unbelievably good-looking! He is taller than I, blond with blue eyes, and he smiled a charming smile at me! My heart pounded so loudly that I was afraid that everyone would hear. His name is Itzhak and he's also eight. I am so glad I was brought to this boarding home, I already feel that it will be good for me here.

I'm already a month in "Tchia." As of now, we are twenty-nine children, but more will arrive. The storage woman put in my upper locker ,my soft hat and white boots which my mother bought me, so that they won't get lost.

In the small-girls room we are four. The name of the principal is 'Uncle Zvi'. He is tall and very handsome with brown eyes and black hair, and he has a beautiful wife called Miriam. The counselor of the big girls is called Rivka. She likes me and calls me 'bambola'. All the children here are without parents. Most of them, like Itzhak and his brother, are from Poland, and the others are from Rumania, Hungary, France, Belgium and three brothers from Syria.

From Italy we are four: I and three others who are brothers and a sister. The oldest of them is Yehuda (Juda). He is fourteen and the oldest in the boarding home. His sister, Clara, is twelve, and the youngest, David, is nine. David is very mischievous, he always hits others so I never go near him. Clara is always busy with her friends and has no time for me, ^{so} I go to Juda to answer my questions.

Juda explained to me that we all arrived with 'The Youth Immigration' that brings to Palestine all the children without parents. When I asked him why all the boys wear skullcaps, he said that it's because everyone here is religious and believes in God.

When I speak to him in Italian, I have to be careful that Tova the counselor, won't catch me, because there's a rule here that it's forbidden to talk any language except Hebrew, and whoever is caught, gets hit. Juda told me he isn't afraid of anyone, and that I shouldn't be afraid either, because he will watch over me. He asked me if I have any brothers or sisters. I told him I don't have any. He said he will be my big brother, and if anyone will dare touch me- he'll break his or her bones!
Thank God! This time my Guardian Angel is for real!!

After breakfast, consisting of cereal or bread with margarine and tomato, we take our school bags and go through inspection: we approach 'Uncle Zvi', two by two, and he checks if our nails are cut and clean and if we have a handkerchief. If not, we have to return to our room, cut our nails or take the handkerchief.

When we return from school, we eat lunch: soup, rice and sometimes spinach. (Yacky!) Then comes the most annoying part: we are forced to rest. The counselor Tova comes to check on us, but as soon as she leaves, we start jumping up and down on our beds. When she hears the noise, she returns and she finds us lying on our beds as if we were dead... In the afternoon we make our homework and then we play in the yard. We have about a million games: tag, hide and seek, ball games, five stones, marbles and also some quiet games like: checkers, monopoly and chess.

In the evening we eat bread and a salad and drink tea. Then we all take showers. After lights-out, one of the big girls sneaks in and tells us horror stories about graveyards with spirits and goblins. Cries are heard from all directions: "Mummy!" -"I am afraid!" -"Sh... don't disturb!" -"I get goose-flesh"... -"I can't stand it any more!" -"Silence, coward!"

After the big girl leaves, I ask:" Who wants me to sleep in her bed?" Many cry out:" I", "I". Then I say 'eenie meeny miny mo', and I jump into one of the beds, and we cuddle under the blanket until we fall asleep.

Our school is called "Eternal Israel" and it has separate buildings for boys and girls. In order to reach it, we have to cross a few streets. Juda said, that on the way back, we will make a shortcut through two backyards.

Because we don't speak Hebrew very well, we were placed in lower grades. In my class we are ten girls from "Tchia" and thirty girls from the community. My teacher is called Hannah. She is tall and talks fast and I hardly understand what she says.

Before we entered our classes, the principal with the white beard, held a morning formation, raised the blue and white flag and we all sang the hymn. When we entered the classroom, we stood to pray for a few minutes and then we sat down to study the Bible. After two hours we all took out our sandwiches. We were jealous of the community girls, because they ate sandwiches from white bread with cheese, while we ate black bread with

jam! Then, two big girls brought us cocoa to drink. The girl from the settlement who sits next to me, hates cocoa, so I drank hers as well!

I best like recess because then we go out into the yard and run around freely.

I wish we had long recesses and short lessons!

In the boarding home I usually play with the small children. In the dinning room we sit at separate tables. The table of the small boys is exactly opposite ours. I grabbed a place against the wall so that I could look all the time at Itzhak. How charming he is, and how poor are his parents to have such a charming son and not to be able to see him and his brother. It's so great for the children here who have a brother or a sister. If you don't have parents, then at least you have someone that belongs to you, someone you love.

I think Itzhak is a wonderful brother, for he is always looking after his younger brother. Some boys here hit a lot, but Itzhak never hits. Yesterday David, the Italian, wanted to hit me so I told him: "I'll tell your brother on you!" immediately he stopped. How can two brothers be so different, I don't understand!

In Hanukkah there was a beautiful performance in the boarding home called: "Hannah and her Seven Sons." The story is about the Romans who caught Hannah and her sons and tried to force them to bow down before the statue. Because they were Jewish, they refused, and the Romans killed the boys, one by one, even the youngest, who was seven years old. When Hannah saw that she had no more sons, she jumped from the roof and killed herself.

I watched the rehearsals and the most exciting part is when the youngest boy appears on stage. The Romans want to kill him too, and he knows it, for he saw how the Romans killed his brothers. He runs to his mother to say good-bye and he cries: "Ima!" "Ima!" and each time he does that - I cry.

At night when I lay in bed and thought of the play, I suddenly understood: I was like the young boy in the play! "Mamma, that's how I cried when I had to part from you! In the story the boy died but I was saved, so if in the story the mother died, maybe in reality you were saved? I was told that Miriam's mother found her a year ago; I am sure, in the end, you will find me too. Won't you, Mommy?"

Tova, the counselor, called me and said that there is a woman who wants to ask me a few questions because she thinks she might be my relative. An old woman entered the room and asked me what I remember of Italy and of my mother. I told her and she said she thought we were related. (I didn't quite understand how, but it didn't really matter .) She said that if I would like to visit her on a weekend, she'll be very glad. I said: "Fine."

Two weeks later Tova rode with me on a bus to Bnei-Brak. We came to a small house surrounded by fruit trees. I met her husband and then Tova left. I stayed on until Saturday evening. They were very nice to me, offered me fruits and a big piece of cake.

On Saturday I strolled with them in a beautiful park in Ramat-Gan. All in all I enjoyed being there.

I woke up in the middle of the night with pain in my right ear. The pain didn't go away and I cried:" Mamma, I need you! Why did you leave me? If you were here, you would embrace me and kiss away the pain. Come to me, please!"

In the morning I told counselor Tova that I didn't feel well. She called a doctor. He gave me ear drops and pills. I stayed in bed for three days. All the girls envied me that I didn't have to go to school!

My aunt and uncle from Bnei-Brak came to visit me. They gave me a teacher's game and before they left, they gave me the most unusual gift: they paid in the kiosk for twenty ice-creams cones!! Whenever I want, I can go and get an ice-cream!!

I immediately went with two of my friends and I 'bought' one ice cream. We were full of amazement at the fabulous idea! We licked it together and it was the most delicious!

Rachel is a big girl, with curly hair, who sometimes plays with me. Yesterday she asked me if I wanted to be her good friend and said that friends always exchange secrets. I told her of my life in the convent and she told me of her life in the cemetery, during the war. I asked : "Weren't you afraid of the dead?" She said: "Not of the dead ...Anyway, at night the Nazis were afraid to come, so I usually slept in a coffin or in an open grave.(Woow!) I asked her: "Is it true that skeletons dance at midnight on graves?" She laughed: "Don't believe everything you are told..."

Today, while I was playing with my marbles, she came to me again and said:

- " I invented a game. Want to play with me?"

- " Sure."

- " Do you know what a Will is?"

- " No."

- " I'll explain to you. Suppose we are going to die, then we first have to put into words of the Will all the belongings that we wish to leave to those we love."

- " Ah..."

- " To whom will you leave your belongings?"

- " To you, to Yaeli, to Tova my friend, to Juda and to Itzhak."

- " Aha! So you love Juda and Itzhak!"

- " No. I just like them a little..."

- "If you say so... Here, write down your Will."

- " You will also leave me something?"

- " Sure thing! Did you finish writing? Then let's exchange papers. First I'll read aloud your Will: "If I die, I, Judith, will leave all my belongings to the children I love most: to Rachel - the blackboard from my teacher's game. To Tova - the chalks. To Yaeli - the pencil and the small notebook. To Itzhak - my five marbles and to Juda - the spinning top I found. To all the others I won't leave anything, because I don't have any more."

- " Now I'll read your will. "A Will: I, the signed below, leave my property to the following children: to Judith - the book "The Heart" because she's Italian and likes to read. To Leah - my unlined copybook because she likes to draw. To one boy, whose name I won't mention, I'll leave my collection of dried flowers."

- " Now let's sign our Wills and keep them forever. Judith, don't tell anyone, because it is our secret."

- " Don't worry. Tell me, Rachel, do you love me a little bit?"

- " What a funny girl!"

- " Yes or no?"

- " Yes, yes, even more than a little bit..."

Before I fell asleep I thought: if Miriam should die, I hope she'll leave me her beautiful doll. To make sure, I'll start to be nicer to her from now on.

At night I thought: who is my father? What does he look like? Do I resemble him? I know I don't resemble my mother, 'cause she has black hair and brown eyes, and I have auburn hair and blue eyes. Then I imagined how Tova calls me to the office and says: "There is here someone who wants to see you." The door opens and in comes a tall, handsome man with blue eyes and auburn hair and I know: that's my father! I run to him and he spreads his arms wide and we embrace and kiss; and it's so pleasant! Then he tells me how he looked for me all over the world, until he finally came to Palestine and to Petach-Tikva, and someone told him: "In "Tchia" there is a little girl that looks just like you." He comes to "Tchia", and the minute he sees me he says: "That's my daughter!"

What a pity it's just a dream!

In Purim, the counselors brought two big crates full of clothes and we burrowed in them and picked out costumes for ourselves. Tova, my friend, became a young lady with high heels and a parasol, while I became a Russian Cossack with a high necked shirt, a wide belt and high boots. Since we were a couple we danced together!

In the evening we read the Megilah and each time "Haman" was mentioned, we sounded the rattlers, while stamping our feet.

Then we went outside, dancing and singing. At eleven o'clock at night, Tova, the counselor, told us to get inside and go to bed. We shouted back: "We don't want to sleep, we want to be wild!" Tova gave up and told us we could stay, just this once, until midnight (!).

What a pity that Purim is celebrated only once a year!

During the first lesson at school, I suddenly felt strange. I got up and went slowly towards Hannah. She asked: "Judith, what are you doing? Go back to your seat!" I heard

her voice as if from a distance and I kept on walking. When I finally reached her, I said: "I don't feel well"...When I opened my eyes, I saw Hanna above me, sprinkling water on my face. I thought: what is she doing? And what am I doing on the floor? Suddenly I heard girls crying: "Judith is dead!" , "Judith is dead!" The teacher said: "Stop crying, Judith is coming to." They all gathered around me and wept with joy.

Later I was told, that when I fainted, all nine girls from my boarding-home were certain that I died and started crying at the top of their voices. I was very pleased to hear that they cried over me. I noticed that the girls from the community, were hardly excited, except for two: one who offered me grapes, and the other, who sits next to me, promised to bring me a pecan nut from their tree.

Now I know exactly who cares about me and who doesn't!

In honor of Passover and Spring, we made an over-all and thorough clean of our rooms. The dress maker made clothes for all the children for the holiday. Then we went into the yard for a group photograph.

In Passover Eve, everything was clean and festive. Uncle Zvi, dressed all in white, reclined on three large cushions. He read from the Hagaddah, and after the holiday meal, we sang many songs. One of the boys stole the Affikoman. It was redeemed by Uncle Zvi's promise that we will all go to see a movie. We shouted with glee!

Last night, while I was sleeping, I heard Rachel shout: "Girls, get up! Judith, get up!" "What? What happened?" -"Something wonderful! We have a State!!" -"Really?" -"Yes, really. Get up! We are going into town!" -"In the middle of the night?!" -"Yes, yes, get up quick!"

I asked: "How so you know we have a State?" She said: "We, the older children, sat around the radio, and heard how they declared at the United Nations of the establishment of the State."

When we reached the City Square, there were already many people there. Everyone embraced and kissed (I, too!) and some even cried. There was a tremendous joy that reminded me of the joy in Milan at the end of the war. Too bad that we had no bells, but everyone danced the Horrah, and I felt as if the entire world turned around with me. We sang with all our strength: "Long Live David, King of Israel!" "Long Live the People of Israel!" We were delirious with excitement.

Towards morning we returned home. 'Uncle Zvi' turned on the radio and we heard in 'The Voice of Israel and Jerusalem', that a war broke out!! 'Uncle Zvi' told us that the Arabs don't agree to the partition of Eretz-Israel and they declared war on us. We were pale but silent.

Then we gathered in our room and we all talked at once:

- "What, war again? I thought we would have it quiet here! I thought it's a safe country!"

- " At least it won't be chaos like in the Big War."

- " This war will be different, because we are in our country and we have an army of our own."

- " But there will be new orphans..."

- " Yes, but they'll be only half orphans, and when the mother will get married, they'll have a whole family again."

- " About ourselves we don't have to worry, since lightning doesn't strike twice!"

'Uncle Zvi' called us to the yard. The older children went to dig long trenches in the yard, and a truck with sand came, and we all filled the sacks and put them on the windowsills and on the doorways. We also covered the windows with blankets to darken the rooms, and we pasted brown tape with webbed pattern.

'Uncle Zvi' explained, that if we are in the yard when we hear the siren, we should jump into the trench and cover our heads with our hands. If we are in the building, we should go to the central room downstairs, which is the safest room.

In the middle of the night I felt someone crawling into my bed.

- "Make room for me; it's me, Yaeli. Are you asleep?"

- " Not any more! What happened?"

- " I can't fall asleep. I'm frightened. There will be bombs, and I will die."

- " Don't be afraid. The bombs will fall far, far away."

- " Are you sure?"

- " Absolutely! You have nothing to worry about. Besides, there are four angels who watch over little children: Gabriel, Raphael, Michael and another one whose name I forgot..."

- " All right then. Good night. ."

- " Sleep well."

She fell asleep, but now I couldn't sleep. I left her in my bed and went over to Rachel's bed. I whispered loudly: " Rachel, Rachel." She woke up. "What? What happened?"

"Nothing. Do you think we will die?" - "Oooph! What questions you have in the middle of the night! I want to sleep!" - "First answer me." - "No, I don't think we'll die. Now will you let me sleep?" - "Soon. Can I sleep in your bed?" - "Are you crazy? You have your own bed." - "Yaeli is sleeping there." - "Then sleep in Yael's bed." - "But I am afraid!"

- "Oh well, just for five minutes." - "All right. Rachel?..." - "What?" - "How can you be sure that we won't die?" - "You don't suppose God saved us there in order to kill us here, do you?" - "Ah, it's like the angel that skipped over the houses of the Hebrews!" - "Exactly.

Now will you let me sleep?" - "Yes."

- " Good. Be a good girl now and return to your bed." (I can't. I am sleeping...)

- " Judith, don't play games with me, I know you aren't asleep." (Yes I am...)

- " Oooph! I have no strength for this child!" (Good night, Rachel...)

Before I fell asleep I thought: what luck that I'm not yet big, because the big ones

probably have nowhere to go when they are frightened...

Last week I did a terrible thing.

Miriam received from her new found mother a beautiful doll with long blond hair and blue eyes that open and close. She doesn't allow anyone to touch the doll. I said to her: "Let me hold her for a minute, I'll be very careful." She said: "No! Only I will hold her. Even if you would burst, you won't hold her!"

I was very angry and decided to avenge myself. I went down and took a stone and when all the kids were playing downstairs, I went up, took the doll to the veranda, gave it two knocks on its nose, and the tip fell off. I returned the doll to its place, and went downstairs with my heart pounding.

Towards evening everyone went up but I stayed behind. Then I heard wailing: "My doll! My poor doll!" but no one knew who wounded it. After supper, which I ate with difficulty, Miriam came to me and said: "I know you did it." I said: "Prove!" She said: "I can't prove, but I know!" I felt awful, because everyone, the Jews and the Christians, believe that for every sin you get punished, and now I know that I'll go to hell, because into paradise I will not be allowed in!

I love to watch the brothers in the boarding home. Today I decided that I could adopt a brother or two. I already have Juda for a big brother, but I also want an older sister and I choose Rachel, because she's very smart and willing to explain to me about life. Yaeli I'll adopt to be my little sister, because she's cute and clings to me. and I manage to make her happy.

So we will be four siblings: two Polish and two Italians: Rachel- the pepper, I - the salt, Yael - the sugar and Juda -the raison. It's true that it's an imaginary family, but it will resemble a real one...

Rivka, the counselor, called me to the office and said: "Judith, you received a letter and a parcel from your aunt in England." I didn't know at all that I have an aunt in England! Rivka told me that her name is Hilda and that she is the younger sister of my mother! Rivka said that she has been corresponding with her for a year and Rivka writes her about how nice, clever, and mischievous I am. Aunt Hilda wrote that after the war she looked for me, for my mother and for my grandmother. Through investigations of a lawyer acquaintance, she found out that my mother and grandmother were taken to a big camp in Poland, while I was hidden in a convent in Milan. Because she was in a difficult economic situation, she couldn't take me and she turned to the Jewish Agency to take me out of the convent and bring me to Palestine. (So that's how the Jewish couple came to me!)

As for the relatives in Bnei-Brak, she clarified the matter and it turned out that they are not my relatives and that it's all a mistake. (What a pity!) She wrote that she would like me to write her a letter, which Rivka will translate into English, and that she is sending me a parcel which she hopes I'll like. (you bet!)

I saw a long box wrapped up in brown paper and on it were beautiful stamps. Inside I found a blue dress with pleats. I tried it on and it fit me perfectly! There were many sweets inside: two packages of waffles and three packages of candies wrapped up in gold paper, each of a different kind! And all these for me!

Rivka said that I mustn't share it with all the kids, otherwise, each will get just a crumb and nothing will be left for me. She said that I should share it only with my three best friends and suggested that the package will remain with her and that each time I'll come to get a little of it.

I wrote my aunt a letter (with some help from Rivka.)

"Dear Aunt Hilda,

I was very happy to hear that you are my aunt and thank- you very much for the parcel. The dress is very pretty and fits me and the candies are delicious. I want to ask you: Do you have children of your own? Do you know what happened to my mother and grandmother? Do you know anything about my father? Do you have photos of my parents? Do you have a picture of me when I was a baby and what kind of a baby was I? Rivka told me that she had already written you about how big and naughty I am, and I have nothing to add to that.

We learn English in the fifth grade and then I'll write you in English.

Answer me quickly and send me another parcel.(Rivka said to add: please.)

A kiss from your niece-Judith."

Afterwards I ate one waffle and it was very tasty. I took in my hands four waffles. Three I gave to my best friends and the last one I left for Itzhak. I found him on top of a tree. I asked him to come down and he said: "Come, climb up." I said: "I can't today, I have something in my hand for you." He quickly came down and I opened my hand and the waffle was a little crumbled. I said: "Don't pay attention to how it looks, for it's very tasty." He broke it into two, ate half and said: "Thanks, Judith, it is really very tasty", and ran to give the other half to his brother.

Once a month we go to the barbershop to have our hair cut. There are three barbers there, but I like best the fat one because he's very friendly. Every time I tell him stories about my 'sisters' and 'brothers', for he is the only one that doesn't know a thing about me.

A few months ago I decided to have a small brother, so I told him that I have a very cute and naughty little brother. A month later I wanted an older sister, so I started telling him about her and he asked: "How is Boaz?" I asked: "What Boaz?" He said: "Your cute little brother!" I said: "Ah...that one...he is well, thank you" and I immediately continued the stories about my big sister.

A month later I wanted a twin brother and told him about the crazy things we do. The barber asked: "How is Ilana today?" I asked: "What Ilana?" (I keep forgetting their names...) He said: "Your big sister." I said: "Ah...she's fine. She is taking care of our younger brother"...He rolled with laughter and I rolled with him.

I know he knows I'm fooling him, but I enjoy it and we play the game as if it was real. I already have so many brothers and sisters that I can't find my way amongst them, but his memory is better than mine and he always helps me out.

Yael told me that Zipora, the abounded girl, is crying hard and no one can console her. I went to her and asked: "Zipora, why are you crying?" She looked at me with red eyes and said: "Everyone has uncles and aunts, only I have no one and I never had anyone, not even

a mother!" -"That's nonsense! if you have a bellybutton, then it's a sign that you had a mother." -"But I don't remember her!" -"That's because you were a baby and babies don't remember anything." -"Do you think that my mother remembers me?" -"Of course she remembers you. A mother never forgets." -"Do you think she loved me?" -" What else! Who do you think wrapped you in a blanket and put you in a basket in front of the priest's door? Your mother! She loved you and wanted to save you, so that you won't die like her." -"But I don't know who I am!" She again burst into tears. Without stopping to think I said: "Zipora, listen, I know who you are." -"You? How do you know?" -"It's a deep secret and I was sworn not to tell a soul, but to you I'll tell, if you swear not to tell anyone!" -"I swear on the Bible that I'll drop dead if I'll tell the secret!" -"Well, then. You...you are a princess!" -"I'm what?!" -"Zipora, you're a real princess and your name is Izmeralda." -"Judith, you are making it up!" -"If you want me to prove it to you - I will: do you agree that you have green eyes?" -"So what?" -"Is it true that you didn't see in anyone else eyes exactly like yours? That's because only princesses have such princely green eyes with yellow spots!" -"But in fairy tales all princesses have blue eyes!" -"That's because they are fairy tales. I have another proof: everyone has red blood but yours is blue !" -"It can't be!" -"Do you want to see? I'll stick your finger and you'll see for yourself." -"I don't want to, I'll faint!!" -"You see? Only a princess faints at a drop of blood!" -" Then I am really a princess?!" -"I told you already! Remember not to tell anyone, or the magic won't work and the king and queen of Poland will never find you!" -"Then I won't tell." -"Good. And when you'll return to them, don't forget me and appoint me to be your court advisor for you'll need someone to tell you how to run the kingdom, when you'll be a queen." -"All right, and I'll also build a palace for you!" -"Great! And make Miriam be my slave!" -"Whatever you say!" -"You see that you have no reason to cry, and in the end you will have it better than all the rest of us? -"You are right!" -"If you say so"...

Rachel saw me from a distance and called out: "Judith, come here a minute!"(I smell a reproach...) -"What do you want?" -" Can you explain to me, how in the world you got the genius idea that Zipora is a princess? (So she told, the rascal!) Don't you think you are exaggerating just a little bit?"... -"Look, Rachel, Zipora is like a story without a beginning, I can invent about her anything I like. Instead of being an abounded girl- she'll be a princess!" -" Don't you understand that you lead her on, and she'll have difficulty coping with reality?" -"What is better, that she'll cry all day long?" -"She has to cope with reality like the rest of us." -"She is not like the rest of us. We, at least, have some relatives, but she has no one in the whole world. So she'll have a dream!" -"You and your dreams! That's no solution!" -"Yes, it is!"(And let reality go to hell!)

A girl in our school died today of a serious illness. Everyone said what a good girl she had always been. All day long we talked about death:
 -" I don't understand God. Instead of taking the bad, he takes the good ones!"

- "Because if you behave like an angel - in the end you become one!"

- "God chooses the good for himself and all the rest he leaves for later"...

- "As someone wise said: 'The flowers go and the thorns stay...'"

- "The safest way to live is to be half good and half bad." We agreed.

In the middle of the night we heard a siren. We went down quickly to the big room and sat crowded together on the boys' beds. It was strange to see everyone in pajamas. We sat quiet and tense. Uncle Zvi' said: "Let's sing, children." We started singing quietly and then loudly until we couldn't hear the shots. We embraced one another and sang: 'How Good to Sit Together like Brothers'. I felt so good and together with everyone, as if we were really a big family!

I felt strange that I felt so good in a middle of a war...

After the movie we saw yesterday, I walked about in a daze, and today in class I continued daydreaming about the handsome actor...

When we went out to play, I heard two girls from my class brag about their fathers:

- "My father bought me a big doll!"

- "My father put me on his shoulders!"

Suddenly I heard myself say: "My father is a Hollywood star!" (I don't believe I said that!...) Hadara said: "What?! Aren't you an orphan?" I said: "I'm only half an orphan."

Dafna asked: "In what movies did he act?" I said: "in Cinderella; he was the prince."

"Really? You are not lying?" - "Does it look like I would lie about my own father?!" Rina

asked: "What's his name?" - "His name is ..Robert Oro." - "How come you don't have the

same family name?" - "Because in movies they need short names. You'll faint how

handsome he is! In the Long Vacation he'll send me a ticket to America, and I'll fly to him in an airplane! He'll teach me to ride horses because he is a cowboy, and he will also teach

me to fence!" I waved an imaginary sword and started to get excited. They stood with

open mouths and said: "How lucky you are!" I said: "My father will introduce

me to all the actors and they'll let me see their movies free. Later, when the movies will

come to Petah-Tiqva, I'll be able to see the movies again for free, and I'll be able to take

with me as many friends as I wish." - "Will you take me to a movie with you?" - "And me?"

- "And me?"

I said: "We'll see. I'll make a list but every girl I'll take with me, will have to give me two

candies." - "No problem." - "Maybe even three..." - "I'll even bring you chocolate!" (I'm

beginning to like this! Maybe I'll start taking on account?..)- "Okay, Bring me each one a

candy tomorrow and I'll put you on my list." (I swear my words have magic! I am happy,

the girls are excited, and on top of it all I'll get candies!)

We argued how babies are born. Pnina said: "Babies are born of cabbage leaves. When a man and a woman want a baby, they go for a walk in the fields. Suddenly they hear someone cry. They bend down and discover a naked, crying baby among the cabbage leaves. They take pity on it because it is all alone and shivering, and they take it home forever."

Devora claimed that there is a storehouse of babies in the sky, and every day, a stork lifts a baby in its beak, and starts searching a home for it. When it sees through a window an empty cradle, it puts the baby into it. When the parents wake the next morning- surprise! Surprise! They find a brand new baby!

An argument started as to who was right. Finally we decided to take a vote. The 'stork' won, because there were four 'storks' and only three 'cabbages'. Sarah abstained because she said it's all nonsense.

Yaeli asked me: "How does the baby lie in the woman's belly?" I said: "It lies there like Jesus but without the nails." -"And from where does the color of the baby come?" -"The color? It's very simple. If the mother drinks milk- she ends up with a white baby, but if she drinks coffee- she gets a brown one." -"What if she drinks juice?" -"Juice? It's forbidden for mothers to drink juice, only after birth they are allowed to drink it again."

"Mother, something terrible happens to me: I don't remember you so well... if you won't come soon- I might forget you!

I asked Tova, my friend, if she still remembers her parents. She said: "I almost forgot how they look like"...It doesn't comfort me at all. I don't want to forget you, Mamma!

Yesterday I went to the storage attendant and asked her to bring down my blue hat from my cabin. She asked: "What for?" I said: "I want it for a few minutes."

I felt it and it was so soft...I put it on and it was so small...

Mamma, when will you come?..."

I went out of the boarding home, leaned on the gate and looked at the street. Opposite me I saw three big girls walking on the pavement. When they saw me, they crossed the street and stood themselves in front of me. The girl in the middle, the tallest, put her hands on her hips and said:

- "Hey, girl, you are from the orphanage, huh?"

- "I'm from the boarding home."

- "It's an orphanage and you are an orphan!"

- "I'm not!"

- "Yes, you are! My mother is alive and your mother is dead!"

- "What did you say?!"

- "You heard me." She looked at me with contempt. "I said that my mother is alive and your mother is dead!" (I felt the blood rising to my head. I'll show her! I'll show the whole damn world!) I gave her a punch in the stomach. She bent over. I kicked her. I punched her nose and pulled her hair until she lay on the ground. She whined: "Mommyyyy!! I am bleeding!!" Her friends were stunned. "Come quickly!" they told her. They helped her get up and she ran away, limping, with her friends.

I stood trembling. The hell with the lousy world! It should go to the devil! I hate everyone!

Tova, my friend, suddenly appeared. "Judith, what happened?" I told her. She said: "You did fine! It's good you let her have it. She deserved it!" -"Deserved what?" Asked Rachel, who just arrived. Tova told her.

- "Well done, Judith! I wouldn't have believed it of you! For what she said I would have killed her!"

- "That's what I did. I killed her!"

- "How did you kill her, if I may ask?"

- "I hit her murderously, and she yelled that she is dying and bleeding."

- "If she is dead... where is the body?..."

- "The body?!... Well, when she ran away, she was still alive, but until she had reached her house- I'm sure she turned into a body, because of all the blood that dripped along the way."

I saw two rows of drummers in the City Square. My legs were tied and my hands handcuffed. I walked in the middle very slowly. From every direction I heard whispers:

- "There goes the murderous girl!"

- "Hang her! String her up!"

- "Judith, why are you so pale?" Asked Tova. -"I'm afraid the cops will come and hang me!" Tova said to Rachel: "Yu, Judith is afraid that they'll call the police. We must hide her!" Rachel laughed. "First of all, Judith, you didn't kill her. At the most, she lost a little bit of blood and from that you don't die. Suppose for a minute you killed her, I can assure you that no policeman will come after you. Little children aren't put in prison." -"Are you sure?" -"I'm absolutely sure." -"That's very nice of them", said Tova. -"Tell me, Judith, the girl didn't hit you?" -"No. She was stunned. She didn't know where it came from. She got it also for all the children that look down on us because we don't have parents. The whole damned world got a punch in its teeth!!"

- "Wow! You are all fire and brimstone! You are really dangerous!" (You are telling me!)

- "Judith, look", said Tova, "a woman and a limping girl are coming towards us. Isn't she, by chance...?"

- "On my life! That's the revolting girl! She lives, may her name be erased!"

- "Yu, look at that swollen nose! The mother, surely, came to teach you a lesson."

- "In her dreams!" Said Rachel. "We'll plan an attack. Tova and I will be your body guards and we will fight for you to the last drop of our blood. I'll flank her from the right and you, Tova, from the left." (Great! She'll have a black end!)

- "You don't think it would be wise to call for reinforcement?" asked Tova.

- "There is no need to. The two of us will handle them just fine."

- "What will I do?" I asked.

- "You don't do anything. You already did enough."

- "No. I haven't finished with her. I'll give it to her so that she'll remember it for generations! She'll be sorry for the day she was born!"

- "Okay, here they come. Are you ready, girls? Hide your fists behind your backs and attack only when I tell you. Understand?"

- "Yes, sir!"

- "Shalom" said the mother. We didn't answer.

- "Shalom girls", she said again. "We came to apologize."

- "Sah..lom", we said.

- " Who is the girl that my daughter insulted?"
 - " I am."
 - " I'm sorry for what she said. She didn't think. I brought her so that she'll ask for your forgiveness." The three of us looked at one another in amazement.
 - " Well, say it!" She told her daughter. " The girl looked at the pavement with downcast eyes and didn't say a word.
 - " Will you say it or do you want me to slap you as well?"
 - " I'm so...rry", she said softly.
 - " Louder!"
 - " I'm sorry", she said louder.
 - " Did you hear her?"
 - " No", I lied.
 - " Sorry!" She almost shouted.(That God should forgive you, ugly face!)
 - " Forgive her please. What's your name?"
 - "Yehudith".
 - " Forgive her, Yehudith. She doesn't understand although she's old enough. I'm truly sorry and I, too, apologize to you. Shalom."
 - " Shalom", we answered in a chorus. (I felt as if the whole world was asking for my forgiveness...). We let go our fists.
 - " There are surprises in life", said Rachel.
 - " She wanted to educate her", said Tova.
 - " Did you see? She didn't say a word to me about what I did to her daughter".
 - " Because she knew she had it coming to her."
 - " To think that such a rotten girl has a mother that will always love her... "
 - " Maybe when she's bad the father hits her with a strap", said Tova hopefully.
 - " There is nothing to be done about it. Mothers love even their rotten kids".
 - " Bad kids and evil people are in every society."
 There is nothing in the whole world like friendship!!

The rumor about the beatings I gave the rotten girl got wings, and everyone came to support me:

- " Those braggarts! They have everything they want, but it's not enough for them; they also want to humiliate us so that they could look down on us."
 - " They are spoiled rotten by their mothers who cluck around them: Putzi-Mutzi..."
 - " Kootzi-Shmutzi..."
 - " Do you know why we have it good, too? Because we could have died, and a miracle happened to us; but no miracle happened to them! They are just lucky, that's all."
 - " Remember, kids. If anyone from the outside will want to start up with us, then:
 - " ALL FOR ONE - AND ONE FOR ALL !! "We shouted.

After I thought of what had happened, I started to be afraid of myself, for I suddenly saw that I have in me something dangerous. When everything is going well, he slumbers like a kitten, but if someone hurts me - he wakes up and jumps like a tiger! I have to keep him

shut up inside me, for if he'll come out and kill, whom will they blame? Me! To make sure that he doesn't get me into trouble, I'll starve him to death. Yes, I'll give up supper for a start.

I climbed up the tree and decided to stay there until everyone will finish supper. From the top of the tree I could see children running around among the rooms. Then I heard voices in the yard: "Judith, Judith, where are you?"

After much searching Rachel found me and told me to get down immediately! She notified the others that the 'lost lamb' was found and that we'll soon go in.

We sat down beneath the tree and I told her about my black tiger. She laughed until tears streamed down her face. Then she said that tigers live in Africa and not in my belly; that what I have is a natural and a normal anger, in light of what happened in the afternoon and in general. She said: "Look, Judith. The only way to get rid of it - is to express it, for the longer you keep it in - the more it grows inside. If you let it out a little bit at a time, it will become less and less."

- "But I'm afraid it will wipe out the whole world!"

- "Not a chance. You were very angry at that girl today, but nothing serious happened to her; so you see, the devil isn't so terrible..."

- "But it is really like a jinni that got out of the bottle. Maybe it's better that it remains shut in?"

- "I promise you that if you let it out, it won't cause any serious damage to anyone. Come, I'll show you how." She took me to the end of the yard. "Watch what I do when I'm furious. I let out all that is heavy on my heart and I scream with all my might." And she screamed!

- "Now you."

- "I can't."

- "Why not?"

- "I just can't..."

- "Then you can curse in whatever language you like, or kick some box." I found a carton and kicked it with all my might and I cried: "I wish you would die, disgusting girl!"

Rachel said: "Remember, Judith, release it each time a little bit, the way a dog is taken out in the yard to pee-wee. Understand?"

we went in for supper.

On the way to school, I pass by a shop-window through which I see teddy bears and dolls. In the corner there is a tiny, pink doll that I fell in love with. Today when I went by, the owner of the shop stood in the doorway. I pointed at the doll and asked: "How much does it cost?" - "For you- two miles. Do you want it?" - "Yes, but I have no money." - "Then take from your parents." - "But I don't have." - "Don't you have money or don't you have parents?" - "Both. Maybe I can work for her like Jacob did for Rachel? Maybe for seven days?" "Maybe you won't bother me, and fly off my eyes?" (What a nasty man!) When I saw Rachel I told her about the doll and she said: "If you like, I can give you, instead, a teddy bear that I found." She gave me a brownish teddy bear with one eye. I took him and bathed him in the sink. He came out shining like new. I took him with me to the top of the tree to look at the view. At night I put him on my pillow and covered

both of us. I told him: "I have no one else but you. We'll be good friends and I'll whisper all my secrets in your ear and you won't tell anyone. Okay? Now I'll sing you a lullaby so that you should have beautiful dreams." I kissed him on his cold little nose. "Sweet dreams!"

It's so pleasant to embrace someone so soft...

I love the teddy bear but I want also the little doll, but there is no one who can buy it for me. I thought: how can I get the doll? There must be someone who can help. Maybe I'll write to someone important? Maybe to the Prime Minister? Yes, that's an idea! I'll write him a letter and explain the situation, maybe he doesn't know what goes on in his country?... After many trials I wrote:

"Mr. Ben-Gurion, Prime-Minister,

Hi! My name is Judith, I'm nine years old and I live in an orphanage. I wanted to ask you something: Could you give an order to the shop-keepers that once a year they'll give away a toy to kids who don't have any? They earn money all year long, so, if one day they'll loose- it won't be so terrible. In order that they won't rebel against you, I suggest that it will be a very small toy.

Mr. Ben-Gurion. I know you are very important and they'll listen to you, and also they won't have a choice. I'm sure you won't object to my request, and you'll also be doing a good deed. Please tell them to start delivering right away, for I'll make myself a Birthday party next week and I'll get a surprise present. I'm sure many kids will love you for it, and when they'll grow up- they'll choose you, too. Thank you very much.

I don't know where you live, but if I'll write your name on the envelope, I'm sure the postman will find you. If you have time write me back.

Shalom!

Judith."

I gave the letter to counselor Tova, and I told her it's important and to send it right away.

Last week they celebrated Bar Mitzvah of three boys, but for other kids, they never celebrate birthdays. I told the children: "Let's ignore the counselors and celebrate our birthdays for ourselves whenever we want!"

Everyone was enthusiastic. I said: "Everyone will choose a birthday, and we'll have it better than ordinary children because we'll choose even two birthdays!"

- "Saturday is best because then we get candies."

- "Whoever has a birthday, will get a candy from every child."

- "Let's prepare a list. I'll be first because it was my idea. So the coming Saturday will be a celebration for me." Everyone agreed.

On Saturday I was the bride of the party and the children gave me plenty of candies and prepared a surprise for me: an orchestra of four kids played on combs: "Light of Daffodils". Afterwards, they raised me up high on a chair twenty times (!) because I don't know my actual age. Ben-Gurion didn't yet give an order to the shopkeepers, so I gave myself a present: two beautiful marbles from my marble collection.

Two days later I had a wonderful surprise! My aunt sent me a special parcel. Inside it were two shirts, candies with gold wrappings and a big bonbonniere. She wrote that it was a present for my birthday that falls on the sixteenth of July!! Wonderful! I finally know when I was born!

I told all the girls, and Rachel said: "So now we know that you were really born and didn't land here from a star!" Haya added: "I thought that you fell either from Moon or from Mars..."

I said: "Quiet, or you won't get candies!"

I handed out candies to everyone and I felt very happy.

I feel that 'Uncle Zvi' isn't exactly crazy about me. He would have preferred that I would have been a quiet, obedient girl; one that does her homework and doesn't climb on trees. Such girls he likes, but I, who am different from what he expects a girl to be, he doesn't particularly like. It hurts me a lot. Sometimes I feel like being good just for his sake, but it quickly passes. First of all, because if I'm good once, I would be expected to be good all the time and I don't want to commit myself. Secondly, because if I'll be good, then God will want to have me with him! Thirdly, because if I would behave like the well behaved girls, then 'Uncle Zvi' would like me, but I would be cheating, because the girl he would like - wouldn't be the real me, and then his liking wouldn't be worth, for he would be loving the pretender and not me.

I wonder what he would have done if he had a little girl of his own like myself. Would he then not love her because she isn't what he wanted? No! I won't pretend for him.

Either he will love me as I am- or he doesn't! He shouldn't do me any favors!

It irritates me that all the people I met (except my mother), Christians and Jews, wanted me to be always quiet and good. But I won't be and no one will "conventize" me again!

Day before yesterday, on the eve of the Sabbath, something strange happened to me. 'Uncle Zvi' made a blessing over the wine and then we all said a blessing and started to eat. At the moment I finished eating the soup and put down the spoon, I thought to myself: "Judith, you are now ten years old, and are sitting here, in "Tchia", on Sabbath's eve at the table. But this day and this moment will pass, because time passes, and you won't forever be ten years old, so photograph this moment and freeze it like a picture." I looked around at all the girls sitting at the table with me. I seemed to see them as if for the first time. Then I looked at the boys in the same way, and at 'Uncle Zvi,' and at the counselors and even at the pictures hanging on the walls, and I thought: "What a pity that a moment like this has to pass and that time passes. Maybe in a few years I wouldn't even be here, and maybe I'll long for this age and this moment I froze, but there is nothing I can do about it and it's very sad"... When the thought passed I picked up the fork and went on eating.

Since then, all sort of things happened but that moment is fixed in my mind, and for a moment - I'll always be ten ...

Some time ago, while I was lying by myself in the small room because I had fever, Rivka came say good night. I said to her: "Rivka, give me a good night kiss." She said: "I can't give you a kiss." I asked: "Why not? Because of the fever?" She said: "No, because if I'll give you, I'll have to give to all the other girls too." I said: "They are not here, they won't even know." She said: "I'm sorry, 'bambola', but I can't do a thing like that." (She is 'yekkit'!)

I don't understand why it's necessary to relate to everyone in the same way! I don't think that there is any other girl here who asked for a kiss. All I wanted was a kiss just this once!

If she would have given me a kiss, I would have shut my eyes and imagined that it was my mother kissing me...

What counselors! Spanking they give, but kisses – God forbid...!

I like the Bible and the legends very much, and now I know for sure that they are true. I read today a legend about Moses. When Moses was small, growing up in the court of Pharos, the king tested him and put two bowls before him: one was filled with gold, and the other with hot coals. If Moses had chosen the bowl with gold, Pharos would have known that Moses would one day grow up and take his place, therefore Pharos would have killed little Moses. Indeed little Moses started to stretch his hand towards the bowl with gold, when an angel came and moved his hand towards the bowl with hot coal. Moses hand was burnt and he put his finger in his mouth and his tongue was burnt, which is why he stammered but his life was saved.

It reminded me of the choice I had to make. The Nazi was like Pharos and he, too, tested me. My mother was the gold and the Christian neighbor was the hot coal. I wanted to choose the gold, but as if someone (who?!) moved my finger towards the coal and my life was saved. My 'stammer' is that now I have to live without my mother; I had to give up my mother like Moses gave up the kingdom and the gold.

I had a toothache and Tova took me to the dentist. I sat on a high chair and the doctor told me to open my mouth. He asked: "What do you prefer: an injection or cold water?" Of course I told him "cold water." He squirted cold water into my mouth and I got a shock because the water was ice cold and it hurt me terribly. I was so surprised by the sudden pain, that without thinking, I jumped off the chair, opened the door and ran out straight back to the boarding home. Counselor Tova ran after me shouting: "Judith, stop! Judith, come back!" But I kept on running. At the end I reached "Tchia" and then Tova caught me. I told her: "You can hit me as much as you like, but I won't go back there!" To my surprise she didn't hit me. (She probably had no strength left...). She said: "I don't spank you because I know it won't help, but you are a very strange girl; and if your teeth will hurt you in the future- don't come crying to me!"

It's true I acted without thinking, but I was so surprised by the pain, for the doctor hadn't even hinted that it would hurt. I'm never warned ahead about bad and painful things.

Even my mother didn't answer my questions on that horrible day and didn't tell me what was going to happen!!...

At night I heard shouts. I woke up and saw Tova, my friend, standing on her bed yelling: "Don't bury me! Don't bury!" I ran to her: "Tova, what happened?" She said: "I had a dreadful dream. I dreamt that I was at the beach, being 'buried' jokingly. Suddenly someone came and covered my eyes, my nose and my mouth with sand. I couldn't breath, I felt that I was going to die!!"

She was trembling. I hugged her until her trembling stopped. Then more girls came and we sat on her bed and told one another our dreams. Suddenly Rivka came and asked why we were having a meeting so early in the morning. We told her and then the little girls came also and sat on the floor near Tova's bed. Since it was Saturday, and Rivka wasn't in a hurry, she asked us what we thought of dreams. We said:

- "Dreams come from the head."

- "Someone is showing us a movie."

- "An angel with a bag of dreams hands out dreams to children."

- "I don't understand! When you close your eyes and sleep, how can you see what you dream?"

- "No dream enters my head! When I fall asleep, I close my eyelids as if they were window shutters."

- "I have many frightening dreams."

- "Me too..."

- "When I have a nightmare I wet my bed"...

- "Last night I had a nightmare and I cried."

Rivka said: "Crying at night brings joy in the light!"

We smiled, including Tova.

"Mamma, I don't see you clearly as I once did... I see you blurred, as in a fog, as if a scarf is covering you face... Don't fade away! Don't disappear in the dark! I don't want to forget you, Mamma!"

Today a childless couple came and told Rivka that they wanted to adopt me. I told Rivka that it's out of the question and that even if they want to adopt me, I don't want to adopt them!

She said: "Don't be silly. They're very nice and they can offer you so much and pamper you the way you like." (How does she know?...) I said: "I don't want new parents, Rivka. I only want my mother and the father I never knew!" Rivka said: "Judith, be reasonable. Maybe they'll never come back." I said: "They will! I know they are somewhere out there in the world..."

Then many girls came and told me that it's worth my while and that it's a wonderful deal, and that they would be ready to change places with me in an instant, and that I'm not

normal if I don't go with the nice couple. Finally they gave up on me and said that I'm plain stubborn who refuses to listen to reason.

I did listen, but all the time I thought: how would you feel if you finally came and found that I have gone with other parents?! I'll never in my life do this to you, and there is no woman in the world that I'll call 'mother' but you!

Today I heard on the radio a beautiful song: "You wait for me and I'll return", and I felt as if you were singing it to me. The song is exactly how I feel, and I'll wait for you, mother, I'll wait as long as it takes. When you'll come back, everyone will say: "She really deserved it, for she waited so long and she never gave up hope."

The couple who wanted to adopt me was so offended that I didn't want to see them, that they left without adopting any other kid! Everyone talked about adoption:

- "In my opinion, one shouldn't allow adults to choose children as if they were merchandise. The same way that natural parents can't choose their children, adopting parents should not choose who will be their children. They should say: "eeny-meeny-mainey-mo" and choose by that."

- "If they won't change this law, then they should let the children choose the parents they want. They should place all the parents in line and let the child pick the parents he wants."

- "Suppose I would have agreed, and then they would have changed their minds! They would have returned me and exchange me for someone else as if I were a library book?..."

- "What? You think they could?"

- "Who knows! Besides, what would have happened if I had agreed and then I would have changed my mind?"...

- "I think that if they adopt, they should adopt everyone. Every family should come and adopt one child, for they shouldn't prefer one child over another."

I thought: if they would have agreed to adopt also: Yael, Rachel, Tova, Juda and Itzhak- then I would have agreed on condition that I'll stay with them until my mother returns.

It seems strange that they were so easily offended. If they are so touchy, then it's better that they shouldn't raise children, for not all children are nice and good, certainly not I.

What I don't understand is why they wanted to adopt especially me? I know I should accept it as a compliment, but I can't, because I don't understand why they favored me above all the other children. It reminds me of the Nazi who didn't kill me and let me choose while he and his friends killed so many other children...

Yesterday I acted up in front of all the girls.

I decided that it's time that I'll revenge myself on Tova, the counselor, and rebel against her for all the spanking that she gives me. I told the girls with whom I share the room:

"Tonight, when Tova will come to say good- night, I'll fight against her like David fought Goliath." They didn't believe me and for a good reason, because Tova is big and strong, and in my heart I was afraid but I decided to fight her once and for all. I invited also the small girls, and they all sat on the beds to watch the show.

When Tova arrived, I stood opposite her at a distance and said: "Tova, I'm sick and tired of getting all these spankings from you! For every little thing you spank me. You are not my mother and you have no right to spank me and I won't have you spank me any more!" She was stunned but she recovered quickly and said: "I'm here in place of your mother, and whenever you deserve a spanking you will get one." I made fists and stood in front of her like a warrior. At this time the girls were rolling on the beds with laughter. Tova caught hold of me, put me over her knees and spanked me, but this time I hit her with my fists. She hit me hard and then she said: "The show is over and everyone to bed. Good night", and she left.

All the girls came over to me and said that they had never before had such an entertainment, and that even though I received a spanking- I was very brave, but it's not worth while for me to provoke her again.

Nevertheless I'm certain that from now on she'll think twice before she spanks me, though I must admit that this time 'David' didn't conquer 'Goliath'...

Yaeli came to me in the middle of the night crying: "I have a witch under my bed!" I asked: "Are you sure?" She said: "Yes, she came out of the dark; at first she had the face of a witch, suddenly they turned into the face of the Nazi woman, then they turned again into the face of the witch, then again..." -"All right. All right. I'll take the mop and I'll check under your bed." I was frightened to death but I had no other choice. I checked quickly under her bed and, thank God, there was no witch there.

I said: "She is gone." -"It can't be! Check again!" I checked and she wasn't there. Yaeli wasn't convinced. I said to her: "Yaeli, is it true that she had a hump, green hair and a nose that reached to her chin?" -"Y...yes..." -"Don't worry, just now I saw her riding out the window on her broom." -"You aren't lying?" -"Of course not! And you know what? In the middle of the flight, the broom jumped on her and hit her very hard and she dove from the sky and fell to the earth and broke apart." -"You swear on the Bible?" -"Of course!" -"But how come you can see her and I can't?" -"Because I am older. Now go to bed and sleep peacefully."

The next day I told her: "I can make magic so that no witch will ever come near you again." I drew a skull with crossed bones and wrote under it: "DEATH TO THE WITCH!" I said to Yaeli: "Draw around it red fire." She drew and colored. I pinched a box of matches from the storeroom and we went to the corner of the backyard. I lit a match and the witch immediately burnt up. -"Did you see? Poof! She disappeared! That will be the end of every witch! Now you can be sure that you will be safe."

We sat around and told one another experiences from our first day in "Tchia". When my turn came, I told them the story of my bellybutton. They rolled with laughter and Rachel took a long stick, touched me lightly on my bellybutton and said: "By this I declare you a Kosher Jew!" We laughed hysterically.

Then we talked of aunts and uncles and Pnina asked:

- "Where is your ice-cream aunt?"

- " She isn't my aunt any more. It was a mistake."
- " What impudence! First she said she was your aunt and then she said she wasn't?!"
- " It's not her fault, it's the other aunt who said so."
- " So let the other one get you ice-cream!"
- " She can't. She lives in England."

I honestly can't understand this nonsense about blood bond! In any case we didn't know each other before, so what does it matter to her if I'm exactly the girl she was looking for? We both belong to the same people, so why can't we be a family? I'm a girl who wants an aunt and she is an aunt who wants a niece. What a fairy tale they told me in Italy that here we are all one big family. Here everyone belongs to close small families!

Now I don't have anyone to visit on vacations. No one will buy me candies or take me to movies. Most of the children here have relatives and I want too!

Zila is a girl who is even naughtier than I am. Except for the two of us, all the other girls are quiet and well behaved.

Yesterday Zila said to me as we were standing near the window of the second floor:

"Look how I swing on the shutter!" She stood on the windowsill and swung back and forth. I thought: it's frightening but if nothing happened to her then nothing will happen to me. Out loud I said: "What are you bragging about? I can do it too!" and I did what she did. Zila said: "But you can't walk on the very narrow railing outside the second-floor window!" I said: "If you can, so can I." She stepped out of the window and stood on the narrow railing and walked the length of it to the corner and back.

My heart beat strongly but I told myself that it wasn't really as dangerous as it looked. I stepped out of the window and started walking on the railing.

While I was walking, I shouted to the kids down below: "Look up! Look at me!" The kids were horrified and called counselor Tova. She shouted up at me to immediately get off the railing carefully and to return to the room. She and some big kids stood under it in case I should fall. Without difficulty I returned to the room. Tova arrived, pale as the wall, and demanded to know what was going on! I told her that Zila showed me and that we are big girls and know how to be careful. She poured it on to us, and Zila talked back to her and said that she will do exactly as she pleases and no one will ever tell her what to do! Tova said: "Not here, young lady. We will send you to another place; I won't take any more of your impudence or take responsibility for you!"

Tova left the room and Zila was called to 'Uncle Zvi's' office. After a while she came out and said that she is leaving because they are sending her to a foster family in Raanana. She said: "They told me that I'm a disciplinary problem and a wild girl and that I spoil all the other kids." Esther said: "They are exaggerating, but why do you have to challenge every danger?" Zila replied: "This is my life, and I can endanger it if I feel like it. Besides, I enjoy the tension and the excitement. (I, too. It's like falling in love...) If they don't want me here- I don't care. I whistle on them! I'll have it a thousand times better in a regular family. I don't need their favors! No one will tell me what to do - ever!!" She went out slamming the door!

I felt awful because it all started because of me, and I was afraid that they'd also send me away. Tova, the counselor, came and sat on my bed and said: "We are sending Zita away because she does dangerous, irresponsible things and is a bad influence. There, in the foster family, she'll be with two big children and they'll be all able to supervise her well. If you want a foster home, well then you can get one. But if you don't want, then I want to have your word that you won't do such dangerous things again." I gave her my word.

Tova left and I felt that a stone was removed from my heart. Except on trees, I won't climb on high buildings anymore, I promised myself.

Poor Zita that she has to leave us! I would have died if they had sent me away! What would I do away from all the other kids? How can you live in a family with only two, three kids? I feel so sorry for her and she doesn't even show that she cares. How lucky I am! But I have to be careful around Tova...

On Rosh Hashanah we went over to a man who had a fishpond in his yard for "Tashlich." I went over to the pond and emptied my pockets from crumbs of bread. Many 'sins' fell down and especially my big sin that the fish must have enjoyed very much. But what will happen if the man sold the fish and I should happen to eat it? Then my big sin will return to me and I won't be able to get rid of it ever! So either I won't eat fish, or next year, I'll turn my sins into pieces of paper.

Because everyone prays today to God, I'll ask him five requests for the New Year:

- 1)-" Every child will go once a week to a movie and twice a week to the pool."
- 2)-" Every child will get two mils a week to spend."
- 3)-" Every child will get a chocolate bar daily and a subscription for ice-cream for their entire life."
- 4)-" Every child will adopt an aunt for entertainment."
- 5)-" Every child will get every evening a kiss and a hug. Amen!!"

I was reading "Robin Hood" and Rivka came to me and said: "Bambola, come downstairs, your aunt and uncle from Haifa came to visit you!" I asked: "What uncles do I have all of a sudden?" Rivka said that my aunt Hilda wrote her that her husband's cousins live in Haifa and she wrote them about me and they had decided to visit me and had brought me a present. (Welcome!) I quickly went downstairs and met two old people dressed nicely, but only the uncle could speak a little Hebrew. He gave me candies and then he said that he wants to take a picture of me. All the children stood around me and he took two pictures. Afterwards they gave me a game of checkers and colored pencils. The uncle told me that they live in Haifa and they will be glad if I'll come to visit them. I'm awfully glad that now I, too, have uncles whom I can visit on vacations!

On Saturday we went to the public garden. "Pussycat" walked beside me. Near us walked boys from a religious boarding school. All of a sudden "Pussycat" stopped and said: "I

think I saw my brother!" I asked: "What brother? Where?" She said: "The one before the last, is my big brother Aaron whom I lost during the war, I'm almost certain it's him." Meanwhile the group of boys had passed. I told her: "Let's go to them and ask him if you are not sure." She said: "No, I'm ashamed. What if it's not him?" She drove me wild! I told her: "Go quickly, otherwise they'll disappear and you'll never see him again!" But she refused.

I said to her: "Then let's return quickly to "Tchia." She agreed and I went straight to counselor Tova and told her what had happened and asked her to do something before it's too late. Tova asked "Pussycat" questions and saw that the matter was serious. She looked in the telephone book for the telephone numbers of all the religious boarding schools. She waited until the Sabbath ended and then called up and asked every boarding school if there was a boy there called Aaron Tennenbaum. Indeed in one of them she found him! She asked him if he has a younger sister called Sarah. He said he does, but they had been separated back in Poland, and he had thought that his sister was no longer alive. It was arranged that Tova would take "Pussycat" to meet her brother. I wanted so much to join and see the meeting, especially since I was the match-maker, but Tova didn't allow. I waited impatiently and about two hours later "Pussycat" came back and said that she was so happy that she found her brother, even though they are not in the same boarding home. I asked her: "Did he give you a kiss?" She said: "No, he is shy"...

I thought to myself: what does it help that I sit in the boarding home waiting for my mother? I have to go out and look for her by myself! If I won't do that - no one will do it for me. Everybody says this is the land of miracles, so maybe a miracle will happen to me, too? Until now I only heard of relatives who had found each other, but this time I saw it with my own eyes. I'm sure it's a sign for me from heaven! I'll start looking for my mother, for now it's my turn to find her.

I told a few girls of my plan and they were excited and frightened:

- "What! You'll go out without permission?!"

- "You'll catch it from Tova if she'll find you!"

- "Don't talk to strangers!"

- "Be careful that you won't be kidnapped!"

I told them: "Don't worry, I'll be back; just cover for me." We put a ball and clothes in my bed so that it looked as if I was in it. I put on my white Sabbath shirt, so that I'll look nice in her honor. My friends wished me luck. I walked and searched and said: "Mother, I'm searching for you but I can't find you. Where are you?"

Then I remembered what had happened to me when I was little. I went shopping with my mother and she entered one of the shops and told me: "Wait outside, I'll be right back." I waited and waited but she didn't come back! I looked for her in several stores, and began running back and forth. When I saw that she was gone and I was alone, I sobbed:

"Mamma, Mamma, where are you?" People formed a circle around me and said:

"Bambina', don't cry, your mother will soon come back to you," but I kept on crying.

Suddenly my mother came and hugged me to her and I felt so relieved!... Now I said:

"Mamma, I'm searching for you now, as I once did in Milan. The way I found you then- I'll find you now. I have an idea: think of me now and I'll think of you, then our thoughts will meet and bring us together.

Well, I know it doesn't always succeed the first time, so we'll try it again soon."

Today, as I was wandering about in the streets, I thought: this world is full of mothers but none of them is mine!... Suddenly a woman came up to me: "Who are you looking for, child?" -"I'm looking for my mother." -"Are you lost?" -"Not me, she is". -"Where did you see her last?" -"Ah... it didn't happen here... it happened in another country"... -"And you are looking for her here?!" -"I can't look for her there!" -"What a crazy idea... Anyway, child, I suggest you go to the police. Do you know where the police station is?" -"Yes. (No.) -"Go to them, they'll surely help you." -"They help find people who were lost so far away?" -"Ah... you mean... you must be a girl from the orphanage!" -"I'm not! I'm from the boarding home." -"I see... look, child, it's not a good idea to go about wandering in the streets by yourself. Do your counselors know about this?" -"Of course not!" -"I suggest that you go back and talk to them. Are you sure your mother is alive?" -"Of course my mother is alive!! (And we'll meet and be happy and we'll never ever part again!) Oh, I forgot, I'm not supposed to talk to strangers"...

"Mamma, in my imagination I see our meeting thousands of times. I see exactly how it will be: suddenly I'll see you and I'll stop; I won't be able to move or to talk. Somehow I'll find myself in your arms and cry..."

When I went back I met Haya and Rachel. Haya said: "What is this I hear about your roaming the streets like a gypsy?!" Rachel said: "Leave her alone, she's looking for her mother." -"From searching in streets one doesn't find mothers!" -"So where will I find her, huh?" -"I don't know if you'll find her at all, but there is hardly a chance that you'll find her here." -"Why not?" - "Well, you know, it's all a matter of luck, really." - "And the more I'll look for her, the more my chances will grow." -"It sounds quite logical, but it's not realistic." -"Even a dream can be realistic." -"I give up. Do what you like," and she left. Rachel said: "If you'll search for her on your own, it will take you years and years." "But if she's also searching for me, then it will be sooner. and we'll meet half way." -"Why do you think that you'll find her here?" -"Because she can be anywhere, even here. Don't tell me there is no chance. There is always a chance, always!"

Rivka called me to her and told me that she received a letter from my aunt in Haifa. She wrote that her husband passed away from a heart attack a month ago, and she is now a widow and very lonely. She would very much like for me to come for a weekend. She wrote that she'll show me Haifa, which is a beautiful city, and she'll introduce me to a neighbor, my age, with whom I could play. I told Rivka: "Well, why not, but I don't know how I'll talk to her, for she doesn't speak Hebrew." Rivka said that she's sure I'll manage. Rivka called her and we decided on the coming Friday.

Tova, the counselor, went with me on the bus. When we arrived, I realized that I didn't remember her. She said to me in English (Tova translated): " I'm your Aunt Margaret and I'll teach you to talk English." Tova left.

Aunt Margaret is a language teacher. She had a student there that translated for me into Hebrew, that this weekend I will sleep on the couch in the living room, but next time I'll come, I'll have a room of my own which is now being fixed up.

We ate a delicious cake and then we rode to the Carmel and looked at the beautiful view. We saw some ships far away in the harbor.

In the afternoon, she introduced me to the neighbor's daughter. Her name is Zipora and she has a younger brother and sister. Zipora invited me to play 'potty' with her. Then her mother gave us sunflower seeds and Zipora showed me how to crack them.

With my aunt I talked by hand signs. I had to repeat many English words. It was quite funny but I restrained myself from laughing. She asked me if I wanted to come to her again and I agreed.

She arranged with Tova to wait for me at the bus station in Petach-Tikva. She put me on the bus, I paid the driver and next time I'll ask to travel by myself.

I thought: how can I help fate to bring me to my mother? I took with me my teddy bear and told him: "I'm taking you with me as a charm; maybe you'll bring me luck." Indeed I saw a woman that from a distance looked like my mother! I followed her and she seemed to feel it, for she suddenly turned around and she wasn't my mother... She came to me and asked: "Are you following me?" For a moment I was confused but I recovered: "It's because you remind me of ...someone." -"May I know of whom?" -" My mother." "Your mother?! Where is your mother?" -"That's what I want to know, too." -"A big girl like you lost her mother?" -"No. I lost her when I was a little girl." -"I don't understand. Ah... you must be from the orphanage." (Oooph!) -"I'm from the boarding school!" "Whatever...In what way do I resemble her?" -"She, too, has long, black, wavy hair." -"I see. Look, child, it's dangerous to wander about in streets; there are people who are...I suggest that you go quickly back to the home and talk with your principal about what could be done. I have here two candies, which one do you like?" -"The red one. Thanks." "Mamma, why can't I find you? "Pussycat" didn't search at all and she found her brother without a problem! I don't want you to think that I despair, but where are you? Why am I worrying, I know I'll find you in the end. I don't despair, not even for a minute!"

When I returned to the boarding home, four girls came running to me. They all started talking at the same time:

- " Judith, don't ask! Counselor Tova found out that you ran away!"

- " You should have seen her face! Too bad I didn't have a camera..."

- " She told us to tell you to go to her immediately!"

- " Judith, what do you think she'll do to you?" (Good question!)

meanwhile we arrived at Tova's room. I crossed my fingers for luck and said: "I'm going into the interrogation room, wish me luck!"

Tova looked at me severely and said: "Well, young lady, what do you have to say in your defense?" I said: "I...I'm sorry I tried to fool you but I had no other choice, because I had to go out of the boarding home." -"From whom did you get permission?" -"From no one. But I had to wander in the streets. It was urgent!" -"Wander around in the streets?! (She reminded me of a parrot). I am stunned! What was so urgent to search for in the streets?" -"It's not what, it's who." -"It's who?" (She is beginning to sound like a retarded parrot...) -"I was looking for my mother." -"I don't believe this! Is this a joke?" -"It's not a joke." Just then Rivka arrived. Tova told her what had happened. Rivka said: "Tova, leave us alone, please." -"Gladly. I certainly don't know what to do with child!"

Rivka smiled at me.

- "I understand that you thought that if you'll search in the streets you'll find your mother."

- "Exactly. "Pussycat" also found her brother in the street. Now it's my turn!"

- "Judith, life isn't all that logical. You have to understand that cases like hers are the exception. It will be a miracle if you'll find your mother like that."

- "That's okay. I believe in miracles."

- "Look, bambola, a girl your age can't wander about in streets. It's very dangerous and it doesn't help because the chance that you'll find her this way is almost non-existent. I promise to write to the Red Cross, and to the "Section for the Search of Relatives". There the chances to find her are much better. Promise me that you won't wander in the streets anymore, and I promise to look for your mother in every possible way."

- "I promise."

- "I trust you. I know your word is good. By the way, there is something I have been thinking of asking you. Would you like to tell me what had happened to you in Italy?"

- "What is there to tell? (Why should I tell her!)"

- "It helps to talk about things that hurt..."

- "We'll see...maybe some day..." (It's nobody's business! And I'm angry at her because she all the time ~~hints~~ that my mother is dead!).

- "We'll talk again soon..."

Last night I dreamt the most horrible dream.

My mother and I swam peacefully in a river. The day was beautiful and the water tranquil and warm. I felt so good, only I and my mother in the whole world... Suddenly the water became turbulent. A whirlpool formed and we were both pulled into it. I cried: "Mamma, don't go away! Hold me, Mamma!" She stretched out her hands to me but she couldn't reach me and she was drawn away...I shouted: "MAMMAAAA!!!" Someone threw me a rope and pulled me out.

I woke up crying hysterically: "Mamma! My Mamma is dead!" Tova, my friend, woke up and came to me: "Judith, don't cry, it's only a bad dream." -"I have no mother!" I cried.

"Judith, she'll come back to you, you'll see..." -"No, she won't, she was drawn back. She can't come back. She is dead!!!" -"Judith, calm down." -"Hold me tight!" -"Here, don't cry, sh...sh...sleep...it's just a bad dream..."

Each time I pass by the window- shop, I stop to look, and I'm so glad that no one bought my doll yet and that I can enjoy looking at her a little longer. Today I said to her:

"It's true that there are many tall, beautiful dolls here, but to me you are the most beautiful of them all. You are the only one I dream about before I fall asleep. You are so small and so alone there in your corner... But don't be sad, because one little girl loves you very much. I would have kidnapped you, but I would be turned over to the police if I'll break the display window and they would have taken you away from me, anyway.. A pity they don't let me love you the way I want.

I don't understand- if nobody buys you, why don't they give you to me as a gift?..."

One of the children told me that Rivka wants to see me right away. I entered her room and saw that she was holding a letter in her hand. She was very serious and said: "Sit down, Yehudith. (I didn't like this beginning at all!) Your aunt wrote you a long letter this time and answered all your questions, especially the ones regarding your mother. (I'm going to hear the truth and I'm scared!) Your aunt wrote: "Your mother and grandmother were sent to Auswitz, which was a very big camp in Poland where the Nazis killed Jews. Only very few came out of there alive; your mother and grandmother weren't among them." (What is she saying? I don't understand!!) -"Rivka, what does it mean?"

"Yehudith, I'm very sorry, your mother and grandmother died." I shouted: "That's a lie! They didn't die! My mother isn't dead!! My mother had survived!!" Rivka came over to me, stroked my hair and said: "I know it's very hard for you to accept this..." I cried terribly and thought: it can't be! It's impossible that this is what had happened to them! Rivka said: "Your aunt also answered your other questions and sent you a few pictures..." I said: "Not now, Rivka."

It was evening and I went out and sat under the mulberry tree. I buried my face in my hands. Rachel came over to me and asked: "Judith, why are you crying?" I said: "My mother and my grandmother are dead." She said: "You just heard it now? It must have happened long ago!" I said: "I know..." She said: "My parents and two older brothers died, too. Do you know, Judith, what I did just before I saw you?" -"What?" -"I looked at the star in the sky where my mother is. Each child has a star in the sky. If a child's mother dies - she's on the child's star and watches over her from above." -"I, too, have a star in the sky?" -"Of course. Pick yourself a star and it will be yours. Every evening you can look up at it and know that your mother is there." I picked the star that sparkled most. Rachel smiled: "I should have known, you picked the North Star".

When I lay in bed she came over to me: "I forgot to tell you that when the Messiah will come- all the Jews will come to life, including your mother, and then you will meet her again." -"It will happen soon?" -"Nobody knows. It might take many years but it will surely happen."

When she left I said: "Mamma, I'll continue to talk to you as before, for you are on my star and you watch over me from above. Tomorrow I'll go to Rivka and I'll hear what else my aunt had written."

What beautiful pictures my aunt sent me! My mother is alive! She is alive in the pictures!!

That baby in her arms is me?! On my word I was cute! (A pity I didn't remain so...)

"Mamma, you are darker than I remembered you and you are so serious. Only in one of the pictures there is a little smile on your lips. You held me in your arms and I can see how great it was for me but you were sad. Why, mother?..."

Rivka read: "Of your father I know very little and I don't have any picture of him. I did have a picture of your parents on a bicycle, but it got lost.(Damn!!) I don't know what his fate was, he disappeared before you were born. He is tall, handsome, with brown hair and blue eyes. As far as I know, he might be alive. I have seen you when you were a baby, and a very sweet one, with blue eyes like steel and bright hair. Right from the start you were mischievous, so I wasn't surprised to hear from Rivka that you are mischievous even now.

My husband's name is Victor and I have two children: Harold, eight years old and Shila, four. In my next letter I'll send you a picture of us all.

Kisses from your aunt - Hilda."

I thought: it's so annoying I don't have any picture of my father! At least I know now how he looks like. I'm so glad he wasn't with us in Milan and that they didn't take him to Auschwitz. Maybe he was saved? That I should have a father at least!

I thought: "I don't understand. It was all in vain? All the prayers, all the requests, and even when I was very well behaved? Even when I waited at the convent's gate? The rotten world should die! That it should break into splinters and fall into the abyss! This world isn't worth a damn thing! So my mother is nowhere? I'll never ever see her again?!

"Mamma, how can it be? I thought that you would be with me all my life! Now I'll never see you and you'll never see me grow up? Mamma, you must come back for I have to explain to you that the reason I didn't choose you then was because I wanted to live, not because I didn't love you! Now you'll never know? No!! I don't believe it! There is no such thing as my not having a mother! You are alive! Meanwhile, until you'll come back, I'll be able to look at your pictures. Now I can see you whenever I want. You are looking straight into my eyes. What a pity you didn't smile then into the camera, mother. I'll keep your dear pictures in my pocket, next to my heart, so that you would hear it beat.

Until you'll come back. I'll look for father, since it turns out that he isn't looking for me as I thought because he doesn't even know I was born! When I'll find him, it will be a double gain: I'll have a father and he, out of the blue, will have a daughter! And then we will be a happy family of three, and maybe I'll even have little brothers and sisters... Yes, that will be nice!

"Ya'eli, let's play a game I made up. It's called: 'to die'. We'll play it like this: we'll lie unmoving on the ground in order to feel how it feels to be dead. The one who is 'dead' for the longest time, is the winner."

-" I don't want to play it. It's 'phooey'!"

-" What are you afraid of? It will be fun!"

-" Some fun!"

- "It's your loss..."

I asked Tova, my friend, and she wasn't afraid. We played it many times. Then I decided to put in some improvements, because to die is a little boring. I said to Tova: "Now let's play 'the Messiah'. I'll 'die,' and you'll be 'the Messiah' who wakes me to life, and then we'll change parts." It was very exciting because it's wonderful to die and each time to come to life again!

"Rachel, when will the Messiah come?"

- "I have no idea."

- "Why does it take him so long?"

- "Oooph! I'm sorry I told you. To a girl so lacking in patience one can't tell anything!"

- "O.k. Don't get angry, I'll wait patiently..." (Oooph, this Messiah! Until he'll come, he'll have to wake me too!). I saw that from Rachel I couldn't expect any help so I turned to Juda.

- "Juda, how long have we been waiting for the Messiah?"

- "I know? Maybe two thousand years..."

- "What! It's so long that he hasn't come?"

- "He's waiting for all the Jews to observe the Sabbath."

- "But there are even Jews that don't even believe in God!"

- "I know, that's the problem..."

- "Tell me, is Jesus the Messiah?"

- "What Jesus in your head!"

- "Because Jesus is also a Messiah and can bring back the dead to life!"

- "You silly! The Messiah is the son of David, king of Israel."

- "Ah... then Jesus is the Messiah of the Christians and son of David is the Messiah of the Jews."

- "I suppose..."

- "The Messiah Jesus will wake the Christians to life and the Messiah, son of David, will wake the Jews."

- "Probably..."

- "What luck that there are separate cemeteries, otherwise they would have been confused..."

He laughed. - "In a moment you'll confuse me too!..." he patted me on my head and left.

Rivka called me for a talk:

- "Bambola, I heard that you lay on the ground for a long time. Did you faint?"

- "What all of a sudden! I just played 'to die'."

- "'To die' is a game?"

- "Yes. We are pretending that we are dead, and then the Messiah comes and wakes us back to life."

- "Bambola, do you know what it means to die?"

- "Of course I know! What do you think I am - a baby?"
- "Then why did you play this game?"
- "Because I want to feel like my mother!"
- "Your mother doesn't feel anything anymore. Death is the end of life."
- "My mother is dead only temporarily until the Messiah will come!"
- "Bambola, she is dead forever."
- "I have to go..."
- "We'll talk again. Meanwhile, find yourself a nicer game."
- "It is a nice game. It has a happy end!"
Maybe my mother is dead to Rivka and to my aunt but she isn't dead to me!

Yesterday I again played 'the Messiah'. When I was lying 'dead' on the ground, I was reminded of the 'Sleeping Beauty' that fell asleep for a hundred years until the prince kissed her and she awoke to life.

I decided that I'll be 'the Beauty' and I'll look for a 'Prince', who will wake me up with a kiss. Of course I immediately thought of Itzhak because I love him and he looks exactly like a prince. But I decided not to ask him for he is the one who has to ask first for a kiss... Then who will take his place? He must be someone cute, for just any boy won't do. I know! Avner, Itzhak's brother! He also resembles him and so it will be easier for me to imagine Avner as being his brother!

I went to look for him and found him playing marbles with his friends. I said to him: "Avner, if I'll win marbles for you, will you play with me 'Sleeping Beauty'? He agreed. I won three marbles and he asked: "How do we play?" I said: "Very simple. I am the 'Beauty' and you are the 'Prince'. I'll lie on the ground with my eyes closed, pretend to be dead, and you will come, give me a kiss on the lips and I'll jump up alive! Isn't that nice?"

- "No!" - "Why not?" - "I don't kiss girls!" - "Silly, it's only a game!" - "I don't want to."

"I'll tell you what: take this stick to be your horse; you will ride on it and shout: "Dan- Di-Gi -Dan on the white horse!" When you'll see me, you'll dismount, count quickly till a hundred, give me a kiss, mount your horse again and I'll jump on my feet wild awake! Remember it's only a game, it's not for real. If you'll play with me, you'll have more marbles than all your friends put together!" - "Okay. But to count until a hundred is a lot!"

- "All right. Count in tens, then." (Oooph! This 'prince' will send me grieving to Hades...)

I lay with my eyes closed and peeped a little... He rode on his knight's 'horse', counted quickly and gave me a kiss. (It wasn't bad at all...) I 'woke up' and asked: "Well, was it so terrible?" He said: "No, but you didn't jump like you said you would." - "You are right. Let's play it again." - "Okay." (More likely the horse finds more favor with him than the princess...) I lay down with my eyes half-closed and I imagined him to be his brother and then the kiss was even more pleasant. I told him: "I won for you three marbles, so we'll play once more." After the third time I told him: "Tomorrow I'll win for you many more marbles, but don't tell your friends because this game is a secret."

We didn't continue to play, though, because the silly prince told all his friends, and they sang in a chorus: "Judith and Avner are a bride and a bridegroom!"

You wouldn't believe what babies these boys are!

Rivka called me for another talk

- "I hear you continue to play 'to die'. I know how difficult it is for you to accept the fact that your mother is dead but..."

- "It's not at all certain that she is dead. My aunt wasn't there. She was in England and she didn't see. How does she know? It's true she won't say for no reason, it's probably what she heard, but it's not a proof."

- "Your aunt wrote you after an investigation that verified their death."

- "If someone is dead he has a grave, right? Then where is my mother's grave?"

- "It's not known, but..."

- "If someone has no grave, it's a sign that he is not dead!"

- "Bambola, you have to come to terms with the fact that your mother is dead."

- "I know that if someone dies he doesn't live any more but there are always exceptions!"

- "In death there are no exceptions. It's a fact not subject to change."

- "Rachel told me that each of us was saved by a miracle and where there are so many miracles, there will be one more."

- "Be logical. You have to see reality with open eyes and stop living in illusions."

- "There isn't just one reality, there are many." (And your reality I hate!)

- "There is only one reality and from death no one comes back."

- "There are many mothers that others thought they were dead and, in the end, they came back: Halinka's mother, Miriam's mother..."

- "They came back because they weren't dead, but your mother is dead therefore she won't come back. (These are only words that can be ignored...) Bambola, no fantasies will change the fact that your mother is dead." (You can talk till tomorrow morning for all I care...)

- "I know you lived for years with the illusion that your mother is still alive. But now you have to give up this illusion."

- "I'll never give up the hope that she'll return to me, no matter what!"

- "Bambola, I know you have a hard time facing the facts. Maybe it will help you to know that she obtains eternal peace and is under the Divine Presence."

- "Is she happy there?"

- "Yes." (But I am miserable!)

- "My aunt can say what she wants and you can say what you want, but in spite of the fact that my mother is dead she'll come back to me!"

- "The sooner you'll accept her death- the easier it will be for you." (This Rivka is a stubborn one!)

- "My mother isn't dead. She isn't in the ground. She is on her way to me and she just hasn't arrived yet. Even if million aunts will say she is dead - I won't believe it. I believe only what I see and she has no proof!"

- "You got to accept the bitter truth. Bambola, are you listening?" (Sure! It goes in one ear and comes out the other!)

- "Look, Rivka, it's all one big, horrible mistake. My mother isn't dead. There is no such thing as a dead mother. Mothers don't die!!"

- "I know it's very hard for you but you got to accept your loss. You have to be brave and..."

- "I'm going to play." (I'm fed up to my ears of being brave!)

- "We'll continue our conversation another time..."

At night when I lay in bed I said: "Mamma, you promised me, without words, that you'll always be with me, then why didn't you keep your promise?... Even though you are dead, if you'll suddenly appear I won't be surprised, because it's clear to me that you will always come back.

Rachel told me that you'd always live in my heart. Isn't it strange that once I lived in your body and now you live in mine?... What counselor Rivka doesn't understand is, that you are not really dead. Some people die and are buried, but some die only temporarily: like the grandma in Red Riding Hood that the wolf swallowed, and Pinocchio that the whale swallowed. When they were in the animals' bellies, they were dead, but when they came out of there, they came back to life. Don't you worry, mother, when the Messiah will come, he'll rescue you from your death. Do you know Mamma that each time I think of you I keep you alive?

Mamma, I don't know how to love myself as you loved me. Maybe I'll write a hundred times "I love me"? But I know it won't help, because ever since I didn't choose you, I hate myself, and you are not here to forgive me, and I don't know how to fool myself that you do!

It's late and I'm tired... What I need most you know without my telling you. Good night, mother, and surprise me okay? You know how..."

I heard from two big girls that Rivka is getting married! (Oooph these counselors! They are always getting married!) And with whom is she, all of a sudden, getting married? Five of us went to her room to ask her and she said: "Yes, it's true and tomorrow I'll have to take leave of you." (Even if she gets married, why does she have to leave? She should live with him here!) I asked her: "To whom are you getting married?" She said: "To a very nice man from Kfar Avraham whom I met through a matchmaker. We'll very soon be married."

The other girls left and I stayed behind. I said: "But you haven't finished explaining to me about death!" - "I thought I didn't succeed so well..." - "Maybe not, but no one explains as well as you do." - "Bambola, I'll tell you one more time: You know deep down inside you that your mother died and won't come back; maybe the realization of it will take some time... Don't worry, today a new counselor who knows English will come, and I'll ask him to translate your aunt's letters. I'll also write her a letter myself."

I hate to part! Why isn't anything - for ever? I really like her, even though she didn't give me a kiss then... She isn't given to anger like conselor Tova and she never spansks. And who will call me bambola now?"...

Rivka called me to her room in the evening and said: "Bambola, I'm going to tell you something that I wouldn't have dared tell you before. Now that I'm leaving, and am no longer a counselor, I allow myself to tell you that I like you a little more than the other children. I'm sorry I didn't give you a kiss then when you asked for it, but I'll give you now and I'll also compensate you with a going- away present which I bought you an hour ago." She kissed me on the cheek and handed me a parcel! In it were two books and in each of them she wrote a dedication. In Pinocchio she wrote: "Don't worry, bambola, you won't have a long nose". (How did she know?...) In 'The Heart' she wrote: "To the cute little Italian, a book of beautiful Italy. Hoping you won't forget Rivka, the counselor." I thanked her and gave her a kiss. I asked: "Can I come to visit you in Kfar-Avraham?" She said: "Certainly. I'll send you a letter with my address. I'll be very happy if you'll come. I'll always have a warm corner reserved for you in my heart." I said: "Rivka, I don't want you to go!" She smiled and stroked my cheek. She left early the next day while we were still asleep.

I went up to my room to take two marbles from my collection. Through the open door I saw Yaeli crying on her bed. I asked: "Yaeli, why are you crying?" -"I want my Mommy!" -"Do you know where she is?" -"No." -" Did you see how she was taken?" "No. She left me at home. She said that she was going to buy bread and she will soon return. But she did not return!" She sobbed. -" Yaeli, the Nazis kidnapped her. They kidnapped many mothers from the street." -" But she should have returned. She promised! I will never forgive her that she lied to me. I'll..." -" She did not leave you of her own free will. She wanted to come back. She loved you." -" No! She is a bad mother! She left me by myself!" -" Yaeli, she is not a bad mother, she is a dead mother. Come out with me for a minute, I want to show you something important."

We went outside. -"I'll show you where your mother is. She is on a star in heaven." -"Are you certain?" -"Yes. All the dead mothers are on stars in the sky." -"She isn't dead, then?" -"Here she is dead but there she is alive. Do you see that very bright star? That's my mother's. Not far from it, do you see another star? That's your mother's." -"How did they get there?" -"When they died, their souls flew up into the blue sky and landed on our stars." -" If she is alive, then I want to meet her!" -"You'll meet her when the Messiah will come. Meanwhile, they aren't alone, for they have each other like we do. Do you know what they are doing now?" -"What?" -"They are watching us from above." -"What! They can see us?" -"What a question! From up there you can see best." -"Maybe my Mommy won't recognize me from far?" -"What is it with you! Mothers recognize their children even with their eyes closed! Now they look after us even better than before, because they don't have anything else to do. They have all the time in the world to look after us, even at night." -"Then a mother remains a mother even when she is dead?" -"Sure. A mother is forever." -"She continuous to love me?" -"She'll always love you. Yaeli, you must behave well, because your mother is watching and from up there she sees everything you do. She doesn't like to see you crying over her, either. She wants to see

you laughing with your cute dimples; so be a good girl, for your mother knows everything, even when she's dead." -"Judith, let's send them a kiss and wave them good bye." -"Okay, and now let's join the kids and play 'Hide and Seek'."

Yesterday we were taken on a trip that I didn't like at all.

It was the first time that we all went together on a trip and we were very excited. We drove to Raanana to a place called: "Kfar-Batya." As soon as we entered there, I suddenly had a bad feeling. We were treated to round rolls and lemonade, and then we were taken on a tour in the village. Our guide explained that it's a very big boarding school with hundreds of children, who learn and work in many places: in the barn, garden, kitchen etc'. They have their own school and even have their own small pool.

I don't know why, but I had a bad feeling all through the tour. I asked other kids how the trip was and they all enjoyed it very much. It seems that no one felt what I felt and I still don't understand what was wrong with that trip?...

We learnt at school about Solomon's Judgment which was very clever. As I thought about it, it came to my mind that it was something like what had happened to me in Italy. It's very strange that the Christian neighbor was there with us. What, after all, did she do there? Probably she and my mother planned ahead how to save me. Maybe they convinced the Nazi to let me choose between them. My mother gave me up, so that the Christian 'mother' will get me and I'll be saved. My mother passed it on to me with her eyes like in Solomon's Judgment, when the real mother was ready to give up her own son in favor of the other woman, so that he should live. Only a mother can do a thing like that, for only a mother can love her child more than she loves herself.

"Mamma, I have very good news - the war is over! We hardly felt it here, except at the beginning, but many young soldiers died and it's awful for their families! We don't have real peace with the Arabs, only cease-fire. I hope we'll have peace with them, for if we don't, it will be bad here.

Yesterday, before dinner, 'Uncle Zvi' said that he wants to tell us something very important. We haven't heard such a statement from him except when the war broke out. and I had a bad feeling. After dinner he said: "We had been together for three and a half years now. This period had come to an end. In two weeks, all of you, will be transferred to another boarding home: to "Kfar-Batya" in Raanana which you visited.(Oh, no!!!) As you had seen, it's a much larger and nicer boarding home. The counselors and I will remain here to absorb a new group of immigrants from Morocco. You, the old-timers, will go to "Kfar-Batya." We will have two more weeks together, and then we'll part, but we'll surely meet in the course of the years."

Astounded and disturbed, we got up and went outside. As if by command from above, we gathered and decided unanimously that we will not leave and we will rebel! It was decided that Haya would write out a declaration of our reaction. We were certain that we would win out.

In the evening everything was ready. We were all excited when we entered the dining room. After 'Uncle Zvi' said the blessing over the food, Haya got up and read from the written statement: "We, the family children of "Tchia," hereby declare, that we under no conditions will agree to leave. We won't agree to be removed from place to place. This is our home that we love. We have no intention nor the desire to leave it. As proof of our determination - we hereby declare a hunger-strike"!! We all as one turned over our plates, banged on them forcefully with our spoons, shouting together : "HUNGER STRIKE!!!" Then we stormed out, leaving 'Uncle Zvi' and the counselors dumbfounded!

We went to sleep hungry and because of all the excitement, we had difficulty falling asleep. Next morning the counselors prepared a very tempting breakfast for us (with halvah!) but no one went near the tables. At school we told no one of what was going on in our boarding home. We came back at noon with our bellies growling, but when dinner was served we didn't enter the dining room.

We stood together in the yard urging each other not to give up. 'Uncle Zvi' told us that he wants to talk to us in the dining room. We sat tensely at the tables convinced that 'Uncle Zvi' will give in. He said: "Dear boys and girls. I understand your feelings. I know how attached you are to "Tchia", your home, the only home you have. I, too, am very attached to you but it's out of my hands. The decision isn't mine. It came from above. The Jewish Agency is determined to transfer you all to Kfar-Batya, and it's not possible to change the decision. Believe me I tried, I contacted different people, but the decision is final and can't be appealed. I ask you, dear children, to stop the strike. Let us spend the last two weeks together in a pleasant atmosphere."

We looked in embarrassment at one another, bent our heads and cried...

I felt so angry with the people who decided it. I felt as helpless as I felt in Italy when I saw the strange boy in my house. Now strange children will live here and a strange girl will sleep in my bed and I don't agree to this!

I thought that there are things in life that you can't change. Even when you want to, even when you fight for what you want, it doesn't always help.

I felt that a beautiful period of my life had ended - one that will never come again...

A week had passed. Today, Yaeli's aunt and uncle came to take her, for they decided to adopt her. She will also have her cousin for a brother. I feel strange. On the one hand, I'm glad for her that she will have parents who will pamper and love her, but on the other hand, I feel sad for myself, because she was like my little sister and now they take her away from me!

I stood there silently when they came. I didn't cry, but the tears choked me. Suddenly Yaeli ran to me, hugged me and cried. I said: "Wait!" I ran to my bed, took the teddy bear and gave it to her. She pressed it to her, then ran back to her new parents and they left.

I don't know why I gave it to her. I wanted to give myself but .. couldn't, so I gave her the dearest thing I had so that she could have it to love in place of me. Even if they'll buy her other dolls, which I'm sure they will .., I know she'll love my teddy-bear best of all.

My friend, Tova, hates so much the idea of leaving "Tchia", that she, too, decided to move in with her aunt and six little children, in their small crowded apartment in Jerusalem. First Yaeli left and now Tova, my partner in games. We promised to write to each other. She gave me a photo of herself and a balloon that wasn't blown up, and I gave her a green marble and half a pencil in a good condition.

I felt so sad, that I wanted to run away from everything! I climbed to the top of the tree and said to him: "I'm very envious of your roots and that you can never be uprooted." He stroked me with his leaves and then he told me about his friend, the wind, and I told him about the mountains. He consoled me: "You have no reason to be envious of me. It's true I have roots, but you have wings that you hide. You have seen quite a few things in your life and you will see even more, while I can't move from here. Believe me, it's good to wander, and in place of the friends you lost you'll make others. Don't cry! I know what I say, for I'm old and wise and you are still a little girl..."

Tomorrow we are leaving. I sneaked away from the boarding home and ran to my barber to say goodbye. He was glad to see me, gave me two candies and wished me luck. Then I went to the shop window. I pressed my nose against the windowpane. Yes, my doll was still there. I said to her: "It's me, your friend, coming to visit you for the last time. It's strange how near I am to you and yet so far...I want to tell you that I hope that another little girl will notice how cute you are. I wish that a small, rich girl will take you to her home and walk you in a carriage. I hope she'll give you all the kisses that I wanted to give you but couldn't.

You must have been hurt that no little girl had bought you. What a pity you weren't Mine! But I spent pleasant moments in front your window and I am sure you were also glad to see me.

I have to go now but don't be sad. If I'll ever have a little girl of my own, and you will still be there in your corner, I'll buy you for her.

Farewell, my little bambola..."

A terrible thing happened.

We started packing our belongings and I got a parcel with all my clothes from the storeroom; but when I opened it, I didn't find my white boots and soft, blue hat that my mother had bought me!! I immediately went to the storage attendant but she claimed that she doesn't know anything, and besides, she is not at all sure that I had the boots and the hat!! I thought I would die!! The rotten woman stole them and lied to my face!! I went to

Tova, but she said she had no idea what was in the lockers, and only the storage attendant knows.

I don't know what to do!! After losing my mother, it's the biggest loss that I could have! How could anyone be so cruel and mean? Why don't they chop off the hand that stole? Why doesn't God punish her? The hat and boots were the only mementos I had from my mother! They can't return my mother to me any more, but they can return my mementos of her!

Each time I stroked my hat, it was as if I stroked my mother. I felt as if my mother was there beside me... "Mamma, I wanted so much to keep a part of you alive. I feel as if you were taken from me once again..." The hat and boots were my dearest treasures. They were the proof that I, too, had once a mother who loved me; that I, too, had been once like all the other children...

Mamma, what shall I do?! I know what you want to tell me: that I have to hold on and continue for both of us. If someone else had asked me, I wouldn't have agreed.

Don't worry, mother, I'll overcome it, I must. I won't break down. What luck that I still have your pictures. I'll guard them with my life, because they are all I have left of you..."

I ran out of the boarding home and went straight to the kiosk. This time I didn't take any friend with me. The woman recognized me. I said: "Tomorrow we're leaving, and it will be my last ice-cream." She smiled and said: "Then it's a special occasion!" and she gave me a double portion in two colors! I said: "Thank you very much, you are very nice."

Thank God, there are some nice people in this world.

We decided to make a closing-show. We wrote a presentation that described how we came to the boarding-home without knowing a word in Hebrew and how we learnt and grew up.

We had many guests from the outside: the school principal, the teachers and people from the Jewish Agency. Our school principal stood up and said: "Dear children. Thank you very much for your beautiful performance, and thank God for the miracle of resurgence of the Holocaust children. You have returned to the land of your forefathers to build your life anew. Now you are like all the other children of this country. I and all of us here wish you success in the future. May God bless you!" They applauded a long time and took pictures of us. We were very excited because we knew it was our last performance and that with it we were taking leave from everyone.

Before I left, I included in my glance all the places I loved and all the people who had an important part in my life, and I took my departure from them:

"Shalom 'Uncle Zvi'! When I was little I loved you because you resemble Herzl (without the beard) and because you are as dignified as he was. Later I loved you because you are good-hearted, honest, and usually, fair. A pity you didn't love a mischievous girl like me too, for in addition to my being naughty, I have other qualities that you didn't know anything about. Although you didn't know me I admired you, and I especially liked it when

you said that we were your children, for in reality, we were the children that you never had."

"Shalom counselor Tova! I hated you because you spanked me, and all your spanking were good for nothing, for I did, anyway, what I wanted, continued to climb trees, get dirty and tear my dresses. But I also remember good things about you: how you were nice to me when I arrived; how you carried me to my bed when I fell asleep in another girl's bed; how you carried me down to the shelter during the war when I didn't wake up when the siren sounded. All that war of 'David against Goliath' was really very stupid. A pity you didn't find a way to discipline me with words, for in that way, you could have reached me more readily."

"Shalom to the Strauss family! You were good and affectionate neighbors. You always allowed me to play in your yard, and you even invited me to come and visit you in the future."

"Shalom tall, mulberry trees! Among your branches I dreamt my dreams and found in you a hiding place from the world. I loved looking around from your tops and feel myself as if on a cloud."

"Shalom my bed! So many dreams and yearnings I felt when lying in you: for my mother, my father and for Itzhak. Will the girl who will sleep in my bed dream and yearn like me?... "

"Shalom "Tchia!" I loved being in you because you were my first home in my new homeland. I loved being with you almost as I did in my home in Italy. I passed in you a joyful childhood and in you I met Itzhak, my first love. I hope that the children who will come after us, will enjoy it here as much as we did.

I leave here an important part of my childhood. Memorable days that will never come again. I hate so much to part, but I'm torn from you, almost as I was torn from my mother... "

A week ago we arrived in "Kfar-Batya". Before we left, I looked back at the boarding home and it looked so forlorn...I cried all the way. When we arrived, they told us that we wouldn't be together any more, that we will be spread out among the different buildings so that we will fit in among the old-timers. It was cruel of them to separate us! We wanted to stay together!

We were unwelcome. For every remark we made, they said we were spoiled. Who wanted to come here, anyway? I want to go home to "Tchia!"

"Mamma, how can I feel close to you if you are so far away? I don't want you on some star in the sky! I want you here to hug me!! Why, the devil, didn't I go with you? Why did I have to remain alone?..."

All the children here work two hours in the afternoon in different areas. I asked to work in the garden for I wanted to work in the fresh air, but who listens to what I want! I was assigned to the clothing storeroom! I needed that like a hole in the head!

One good thing happened today. Zila, who was sent away from "Tchia", came for a visit! What turns out? Her foster family lives in a little house just opposite "Kfar-Batya!" That's so odd! She told us that she is very satisfied with her life and that she actually has it good. How the wheel turned! In "Tchia" I was sorry for her and now I'm envious!

I thought how everything depends on timing. If the couple who wanted to adopt me would have appeared today- I would have agreed to see them and even go to them a few times on trial, to see if we are suited to one another. I would so much want them to appear today because I don't want to be here. The attitude of the counselors here is so impersonal, they don't consider my wishes and I hate it here!

On top of that, the principal is antipathy, but there is one thing that he does that I like: he wakes us every morning with light classical music over the loud -speakers.

I like starting the day with beautiful music.

I found here many good friends. They accompany me wherever I go and see to it that I am not left alone. They teach me things my mother would have taught me, if only she could have. Even when we part, it's never for long. Whenever I want to, I can set another appointment. When we are together again, I'm so glad that I take them to bed!

They visit me when I am sick, they are not afraid of any illness. Whenever they see me sad, they offer a comforting word: "Listen, child, there were children before you who overcame hardships. Pay attention and take them as an example."

When in Tchia the games were my friends, here they are my books...

Yesterday afternoon I lay on my bed reading. When I got up and wanted to go out, one of the old-timers held the knob of the door from the outside and didn't let me open the door! I told her to stop that nonsense, but she didn't and, instead, laughed like a deranged. Then rescue came from an unexpected source. One of the counselors came to the door and asked: "What's going on here?" I told him through the door, and he ordered her angrily to let go. When I came out he apologized for her, smiled at me and asked: "What's your

name?" I told him. He said: "My name is Haim." I said: "I know." He smiled. "You know, huh? In what class are you?" -"The fifth." -"Well, I'll be your Bible and music teacher."

Great! The subjects I like most! How I wish that school would start!

I'm already two weeks in the fifth grade.

We study here boys and girls together, and I now have an opportunity to see another side of Itzhak; he is the best pupil in our class and very much loved by the teachers.

Except for the teacher who teaches English, the other teachers are quite nice; but my most beloved teacher is, of course, Haim. He plays the accordion and teaches us beautiful Russian songs. I especially love the sad ones because they arouse all my longings and fill my heart with sweet sadness.

On Wednesday, our free afternoon, I went to visit Zila. There was a little girl there who asked Zila to read her "Henzel and Gretel". While I was listening to the fairy tale I thought: what a stupid story! How could I have loved it once? How could I have been so naive? Only naive children can believe that only in fairy tales children are burnt in ovens. In the fairy tale the children succeeded to burn the witch, but in real life, the witch burnt all the children in the oven! Only in fairy tales the good ones are saved at the last minute; in real life, no one saved them, not even God! All fairy tales promise a good end, but life doesn't keep the promise.

Then I read the book "Red Riding Hood" and I had the feeling that I was reading about... myself. In my 'book' there was also a big bad wolf who swallowed grandma; but he wasn't yet satisfied so he swallowed also mother and then many more mothers and grandmothers. Only Red Riding Hood, who answered the bad wolf's question, was the only one who survived. Only at the end the hunter intervened and killed the wolf, but the mothers and grandmothers couldn't be saved any more. Red Riding Hood was left by herself in the dark forest, because everyone disappeared; and since then she doesn't live happily ever after...

As I was walking on the path, I saw Haim coming towards me. I asked him: "Haim, do you know English?"

- "Yes. Why do you ask?"

- "Because...I wanted to know..."

- "Is there any other reason?"

- "Well... because you are cute." (I wanted to bite my tongue!) He laughed.

- "Say, don't you have, by chance, an older sister?" (The 'bastard' wants me older!) He ruffled my hair and left.

I said silently: "Haim, wait for me a few years; for what are 19 years between you and me, they aren't even 20!!"

Today I received a letter from my friend Tova, a letter which I didn't like one bit. She wrote:

"Shalom Judith,

I don't live with my aunt anymore. I live in a very religious boarding school. I don't study secular subjects and I don't see movies or read books, except for religious books. I found the true road and I don't occupy myself with the worthless things of this world. I hope that you, too, will see the light.

With best wishes,

Tova."

The poor girl completely lost her mind! How they brain-washed her! I was very angry at first, but now that I'm calm, I see that she is to be pitied, because she lives as if in a convent, except that there is no one who can get her out of there. I'm sorry for her and for the loss of our friendship, but that's what happens, I guess, when each one goes her way. There is no point in answering her, because we live in two different worlds now and we have nothing in common any more.

But the Tova she once was- I won't forget..

Sarah told me today that I'm beginning to be a woman and I wasn't pleased at all. She must have said it because of these 'bumps' I have. Oooph! I thought I had succeeded in hiding them! From where did they pop, anyway? They were there all the time hidden in my body? What's this supposed to be that I go to sleep as one girl and awake as another? I'm worried that now my childhood is over. How, in heaven's name, can I be grown-up, if I haven't yet been a child?... On a second thought, I don't mind being a woman, really not, but not now, maybe in twenty years...

Rachel saw me and asked: "Why are you walking around with such a long face?" I told her. She laughed: "It's really not so bad, you know, and don't make a Greek tragedy out of it. Okay?..."

I told Haim that I received a letter from my aunt. He invited me to his room, offered me a glass of orange juice and then read:

"Dear Judith,

As I have already written before, I know very few details about your father. I know he is a jeweler and that he was born in Poland. He and your mother met in France, then they lived in Switzerland and finally in Italy. I know that their economic situation was very bad but they loved each other very much. One day, though, there was a big quarrel between them (the reason for which I'll explain to you when you are older), and your father left the house and disappeared. Because of all this, it'll be very difficult for you to find him if he's still alive.

We have relatives in America called "Zuckerman" but I don't know their address. It's interesting that your grandmother's mother lived in Jerusalem at the beginning of the century and was buried there. Her name was Feige Levi.

I include here a picture of us. There is a parcel on the way for you.

Kisses from your aunt and all the family."

Haim said: " I understand that you're trying to find your father. I suggest that you write to "The Department for Search after Relatives" in Jerusalem, and ask them to broadcast his name on the radio. This way there is a chance you'll get some information. Go write the letter. and meanwhile. I'll look for their address."

We have Hanukah vacation and I traveled to Haifa by myself. This time I slept in the room my aunt prepared for me. It's a big room with a bed, a wardrobe and a table with four chairs. I never had a room all to myself and I feel like a princess!

I know already a little bit of English. What I don't like about my aunt is, that she laughs at me when I say the blessing when we eat. I told Fella, her student, and Fella told me that my aunt is an atheist and that it's difficult to change her at her age. Fella is Italian and very beautiful. She's is twenty- four years old and she could be perfect for Haim but I want him to myself! Fella said that if I'll come to Haifa for Passover, she'll invite me over to her house, on the last day of the holiday, and her mother will cook for me a very tasty Italian food.(!)

When I returned to "Kfar Batya", Lea, who is the most developed girl in our class, told me in secrecy, that almost every night around midnight, counselor Levi comes and sits on her bed and strokes her under her shirt! She told me that she is afraid and doesn't know what to do!

What a contemptible man! I don't understand how he endangers himself like that. and how his wife doesn't see that he isn't in her bed?! I wreck my head what to do. To tell the principal is out of the question. for he is not someone you can talk to. Maybe it's possible to tell on him to the police? But I don't think policemen deal with such things. Then what can be done? It's so frustrating that I can't find a solution!

That night I dreamt that a policeman was chasing a man, trying to catch him with a lasso. The policeman threw the lasso over the man's head, it fell down to his feet, the policeman pulled it, and the man rocked and fell on his face. I ran quickly to see who he was, but by the time I arrived the man had disappeared into thin air! I looked with amazement at the policeman and what a surprise! It wasn't a policeman at all, it was a policewoman!! She smiled at me a smile of victory and winked!

I woke up. What a strange dream! I thought of it a bit and suddenly I understood: the man was Levi and his wife was the policewoman! Yes! She is the best policeman in the world! The dream solved the problem! Now all I have to do is to tell his wife. But how can I tell her? I can't tell her to her face! I know! I'll write her an unanimous letter! It's so simple. Everyone was asleep around me and I sat on my bed and wrecked my head and finally I wrote:

"SHALOM ESTHER,

I'M SORRY TO TELL YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND, ALMOST EVERY NIGHT AT MIDNIGHT, STEALS FROM YOUR BED AND GOES TO MAKE OUT WITH ONE OF THE GIRLS- SO KEEP YOUR EYES ON HIM!!!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DIVORCE HIM, BECAUSE YOU HAVE TWO LITTLE BABIES.
RESPECTFULLY,
ONE OF THE GIRLS."

But now I have another problem - how to give her the letter. If I'll put it in their letter box, Levi might find it. What should I do? I know! A few minutes before eight he leaves the flat and Esther remains by herself. I'll hide in the toilette until all the girls leave for school and then...

When all was quiet I went along the corridor, ran quickly to their room, and with pounding heart, I pushed the letter under their door and flew away from there. Too bad I'm not invisible! What wouldn't I have given to hear his wife give it to him! The next day I asked Lea if Levi visited her again and she said he didn't.
Three cheers for me!

When reality is difficult, or boring, I say "poos", and in a second I find myself in a magical world where I have parents waiting for me at home to love and pamper me as if I was a princess. There I have a small house and a beautiful garden. I stroll near a blue lake, around me are musical trees, a stream flows among the rocks and I feel so happy and free. But reality doesn't like me to be there and she sends messengers who call me back saying: "Hey, Judith, stop dreaming!" When they wake me - the princess once again turns into Cinderella...

Today Haim called me in for a talk. He said: "Judith, all the teachers complain about your day-dreaming". (Yes, today the English teacher said: "The one who excelled on the test, is Judith the dreamer, she received minus thirty-five points!") -"Let them complain. I like living in more than one world." -"But it's not reality. You must stop floating on clouds and be right here with us on earth."

They want to take away my one and only joy? I lost enough in life, my beautiful world of dreams I don't intend to loose! Who cares if my reality is imaginary? When I'm there it's the most real. There I'm never alone, like here, and there I'm always loved. To make sure I'll put up signs: OUT OF BOUNDS! STRANGERS NOT ALLOWED!
No! My private paradise I'll never give up!

Shula is a girl who is younger than me. She doesn't have any relatives and except for her name she doesn't know anything about herself. She must have chosen me to be her 'big sister', 'cause she often comes to me to ask me questions.

Today she saw a dead porcupine in the garden and asked: "Is it true that I, too, will one day die?" -"Yes, it's true." -"Did you ever think how you would like to die?" -"In my sleep, but it isn't urgent..." -"How do we know who will go to paradise and who - to hell?" -"It's simple: those who are a little good and a little bad go to Purgatory, which is a place

between Heaven and Hell. There the sinners learn morals and good manners. Finally they go before an admission's committee that decides who⁵ will go up a grade to paradise and who will go down a grade to hell." -"Ah..." -" Death, you know, is the end of life, but only here on earth; on another planet, death is the beginning of a new life." She smiled with satisfaction.

"Mother, I hate forgetting you! First you disappeared from my life and now you disappear from my memory...I remember only your dark eyes and your long, black hair. I cling to your long hair as I once clung to your nightgown, each morning I found myself alone in our bed.

But don't worry, mother, even if my eyes will forget you, my heart never will..."

Today is Mother's Day, the day when every boy and girl give mother a present. Because you aren't here and I can't give you anything, I'll send you, instead, a letter of love.

"Dear mother. I want to tell you that I love you immensely, and that you were a wonderful mother to me, always giving me lots of love. You would laugh, but I tried 'to mother' myself in your place, without any success... It's a pity that you weren't born double, for then, at least one of you would have remained alive...

Only five and a half years had passed since we were separated and it seems as if it happened a very long time ago. I'm still crying over you and over me that They didn't let us live together as we wished, and that I'm no longer the same happy girl. I know I should have long since got used to it but I haven't.

Mamma, do you know that when you left you took all the love with you? Nothing was left, not even a drop! I feel bad now, because I wanted to make you happy today, and look how it turned out! I know it isn't fair that I cry to you, but you are my mother, and to whom will I cry if not to you? Who cares at all what I feel?

From the eleven and a half years I'm on earth, our five and a half years together seem today like a dream. You were my mother for such a short time! If we were given one moment together, Mamma, I would have embraced you and cried... It's so strange that you remain as you were, and only I change; but even when I'll grow up, I'll always remain your little girl. Although you are so far away, you are many times near, for now you live in me...

I'm a little confused today. I don't know what I want from myself or from you. Maybe I should have lied to you and told you that everything is fine with me so that you would be glad? But you know I couldn't lie to you and anyway you would have discovered my lie. I wouldn't have wanted you to think that I always feel so bad and next Mother's Day, I'll try not to be so sad. Don't think that I'm just saying this to console you, I'm telling you because I know myself and I know it will pass away and I'll again feel strong.

Yesterday I read a beautiful sentence: "In the dark it's hard to believe that the sun will shine again." I do believe the sun will shine, and I'll smile again, it's just today that I'm a little cloudy...

When I was little I didn't tell you that you are a wonderful mother, the best in the whole world. I always knew I loved you, but I didn't know how much. 'Ti amo, Mamma'.

How will you read this letter if you don't know Hebrew? I'm sure someone there will translate it for you, or maybe you don't need translation because you can read me, for every mother can read her child in every language.

Goodbye, mother, until next Mother Day.

Yours with love, sadness and longings-

Judithline "

I'm glad Tova gave me a balloon as a farewell present. I blew up the white balloon and tied the letter to it. I wrote: "To mother", and threw the balloon into the air. I watched it as it flew skyward until it became a dot and then disappeared...

A week ago a mischievous mood came over me. After finishing my exam on the Bible, I wrote in the bottom corner: "Read 'the Song of Songs', chapter one, sentence one."

Today, when Haim gave us back the exams, he told me to stay in the classroom at the end of the hour.

When we were alone, he put my test on his table, pointed at the note and asked: "Did you write this?" -"Me?! What all of a sudden! King Solomon wrote it!" -"So!..May I ask what is the connection between this and the exam?" -"There is no connection." (You are the connection, dummy!) -"Why did you write it?" -"I don't remember now. it was a long time ago..." -"So you don't deny that you wrote it?" -"No, maybe it escaped from my pencil or something like that..." -"You were reminded of a beautiful line in the Bible and you wanted to share it with me?" -"Ahm..." (I would never admit the truth!) -"I would like you to explain to me what you had in your mind when you wrote it". (In your dreams!...) -"I didn't write it, I just pointed out where it appears." -"I would be happy if you displayed such knowledge in several other books of the Bible." -"I'm knowledgeable only in portions that find favor in my eyes." -"I see...By the way, do I also find favor in your eyes?" -"Not at this moment!" He laughed. "Let's conclude that from now on, you'll answer exams on the Bible without citing references. Agreed?" -"Yes, captain!" -"You may go."

What an inquisition! I should have sent him to the book o Job!"...

I heard a talk between two older boys. They said that the Nazis killed one and a half million children!!

Now I understand even less what had happened there. and why the Nazi had mercy on me when he let me choose my own fate. What could have caused him to have pity on me?

Maybe I reminded him of someone he knew? Maybe even of his little daughter?...

What would another girl have done if she were in my place? Maybe she would have followed her mother with closed eyes and would have ignored the danger's signs? Maybe my mother and my neighbor had paid the Nazi in order to save me and he compromised with himself by letting me choose?

It drives me mad that I have no one to ask but myself!

I received a letter from Mrs. Strauss, our neighbor from "Tchia," inviting me to visit them. I gladly accepted the invitation and I took the bus to Petach-Tikva. The whole family welcomed me and wanted to know how I felt in "Kfar-Batya". I told them and they said I could come to them whenever I felt like it.

After being with the ~~me~~ for an hour or so, I couldn't restrain myself any longer. I walked all around the fence and entered "Tchia". Tova, the counselor, saw me and stood amazed. Suddenly she ran to me and hugged me (!!). Then she said to all the kids there: "This is a very nice girl (who? Me??) who had lived here." I looked at the children and they were all strangers to me. Then I looked at the building and it looked so changed, for they painted the walls and the railings and suddenly it wasn't my boarding-home any more! Everything looked so different and so unlike what I had thought it would be...

Then I walked over to my trees. Thank God, they hadn't changed. I embraced the tree trunks and I searched and found on one of them what I had once scratched with a nail: a drawing of a heart and inside the letters: "J.I."

I saw that everything and everyone changes: I, other people, even a house, but trees that are planted in the ground - never change, and I hope that they would never be uprooted!

The Passover Holiday arrived, and we celebrated the "Seder" exactly like in "Tchia". We read all the "Hagada", sang all the songs and the food was very tasty. I sat at Haim's table and it was I who stole the "Afikoman". Haim asked me: "What does the young lady want in exchange for the "Afikoman"? I said: "A ring." He asked: "A wedding ring?" And they all burst out laughing." (Ha ha, you dummy!) I said: "No. I want a ring with a blue stone in it". Haim declared: "A ring with a blue stone you want - a ring with a blue stone you'll get!"

The next day I took the bus to Haifa. My aunt was very glad to see me, and in the afternoon she took me to visit a very nice "Yekke" family. Their younger daughter, Ruthi, is my age. She is a charming girl, exceptionally beautiful and very clever and friendly. She lent me the book: "Gone With the Wind" and invited me to come to her again.

Almost all the people in the city are secular who don't even believe in God. (even Ruthi). They lead a very pleasant life: they go to movies, theatres, concerts and the youngsters go to the Scouts.

Today when I went down to Zipora, I heard her mother shouting at her for not putting her room in order and Zipora shouted back at her mother. I was amazed and when Zipora's mother left the room, I couldn't restrain myself and I said reproachfully to Zipora: "How could you have talked back and shouted at your own mother!" Her aunt heard me for and said: "Judith, maybe you don't know it, but it's natural for a child to be impudent, sometimes, to her mother. There is no girl who is an exemplary girl, and no mother who is a perfect mother. Because you don't have a mother, you have a concept of motherhood that is incorrect. A mother is an ordinary woman just like every other woman."

I was astonished at what she said. I thought: "It's true that a mother to me is someone sacred and not an ordinary woman. Maybe she is right. Maybe only a dead mother is good all the time, and a live mother is sometimes 'bad'. I see that an ordinary girl takes her mother for granted and even shouts at her, and it this is something I find very hard to accept. Though in my head I understand it, in my heart I can't believe that my mother is not the ideal mother.

When I walk in the street I look at passing men and wonder which one of them is my father. Today I saw a man that looked just right. He was tall, had curly brown hair and blue eyes. He was standing near a kiosk buying himself a package of cigarettes. I thought: maybe I'll go to him and ask: 'excuse me, Sir, did you once live in Italy and was your wife's name Anna?' But if it isn't him, he will think that I fell on my head! No, I must be more subtle and ask: 'excuse me, sir, maybe you...lived in Italy 13 years ago? You look very much like someone I know.'...When I saw that he was paying and ready to go, I went up to him and asked: "Excuse me, sir, maybe you...know what is the time?" -"Half past five." -"Thank you." He was gone.

What a coward! I could have slapped myself! I don't feel like ever speaking to myself again!

Oooph! Why is life so complicated?...

It's the last night of Passover and Fella, the Italian, keeps her promise and takes me to her home. Her mother embraces me and asks me how I feel. We sit down and eat the most delicious supper. After supper, her brother plays the mandolin and we all sing Italian songs. Afterwards her sister puts a record on the gramophone and then we dance rondo in a long line.

The melody envelops me and I am full of longings... Suddenly I see the chestnuts' man near the fountain and a little girl running barefoot looking exactly like me...

Fella's mother asks: "Would you like another slice of cake?" -"Thanks, why not? m.m. what a tasty cake".

All at once I'm in Haifa again and Italy is far, far away...

When I returned to "Kfar-Batya" Haim saw me and said: "Come to my room at three in the afternoon." I went and he gave me a tiny bag with a pink ribbon around it. He said: "Open it". I opened and inside was a cute ring with a blue stone! I put it on and it fit me perfectly. I told him it was very nice of him that didn't forget his promise. He said that he never forgets his promises, especially the ones given on Passover.

I look at my beautiful ring all the time and I enjoy it very much, because it's beautiful and because it's from Haim and he went to the trouble of picking it for me.

Lately I watched all the children from "Tchia" and I saw that they all fitted in well and it's now impossible to distinguish between the children from "Tchia" and the old-timers of "Kfar-Batya." They are all satisfied, especially Itzhak, who looks very happy. I'm glad for him but I still miss the feeling of brotherhood that I felt in "Tchia". Although there are a great many children here, I miss terribly not having a good friend.

Levi is now 'a good boy Jerusalem' and doesn't make any more nightly visits...

What is so frustrating is that no response whatsoever came to my inquiry over the radio about my father. There isn't in Israel even one person who knows him! Maybe he is still abroad, but how can I find him there?

Before I fell asleep I once again thought of what had happened there. Had the Christian neighbor been there before we arrived? Could it be that she went to the Nazi to try and save me? Maybe she told him that she was my mother and that was the reason he asked me that question in order to see whether I'll choose her? For it's not logical that a girl won't choose her mother and choose her neighbor, instead. When his test succeeded and I did choose her, he became convinced and let me go with her.

Yes, that's how it must have been...

Zipora phoned me to say that her class is making a bonfire on the eve of Independence Day and she'll be glad if I came. I took the bus to Haifa, said Shalom to my aunt but most of the time I spent with Zipora.

Her class gathered at seven in the evening. I didn't feel comfortable because I was the foreigner; everyone looked at me and I had a feeling as if I was standing for a test. I told myself it's not so terrible, after all, for the important thing is the adventure.

We all went to the City Square. It was all lit up and the loudspeakers broadcasted dance music. We danced many folk dances and Horrah. We clasped hands to make a long chain, and in the middle of all the excitement we found ourselves in a whirlpool of circles. I held tightly to the hands on either side of me, in order not to get disengaged from the chain. I felt tied up like a link in a long, long chain. I felt that the promise had been kept and that today we are really one big family.

At ten at night we went to the beach, lit a bonfire, ate 'falafel', drank black coffee and sang many Israeli songs. It was great to see the flames and sparks of the fire and hear behind us the roar of the waves.

At midnight we all went home and I slept over at Zipora's. Next morning we slept late and then I went home to tell my aunt of last night's events. (My English is quite good now.)

My aunt surprised me by buying me a movie - stars magazine called: "The World of Cinema." On the last page I found the addresses of movie stars. I jumped on the chance

and decided to write to Tyrone Power, who is very handsome. I wrote with my aunt's help:

"Dear Tyrone Power,

I'm a Jewish girl from Israel, eleven and three-quarters years old. I saw a film with you and I liked you a lot. Please send me a photo of yourself so that I can look at you as much as I want and brag about you in front of all the girls.

Send it quickly, please.

Yours affectionately,

Judith "

Now I have to wait for an answer but I'm sure he'll write back.

Tonight again I couldn't sleep and again I recalled...

Strange how everything happened then so fast and there wasn't even a minute to think, while now I have all the time in the world to think of every detail.

First of all, who called my mother? Was it the Nazi who ordered her to come? Probably one of the neighbors told on us that we were Jews in order to gain money from our lives!

Secondly, why didn't my mother talk to me? Why didn't she answer my questions? Why did she, who always loved me, ignore me??

Thirdly, why was our Christian neighbor also there? Who told her to come: my mother? Did she come of her own will or did the Nazi tell her to come? Did my mother and the Christian neighbor plan to maneuver me in a way that I won't choose my mother but the neighbor? Did they first talk to the Nazi, or did he decide by himself to ask me the question?

And my mother- why did her face look like a white mask? Was it the mask of death?

Maybe she was frozen with fear and she succeeded to pass on to me her fear of death and I didn't want death and chose life?

Why, why, why, didn't They let us embrace for the last time? At least to give a kiss and ask for forgiveness...

Everything that had happened there is a mystery that no one will ever be able to solve...

Today I heard two big girls say that Haim was leaving "Kfar-Batya" in order to study in Switzerland. I felt my blood drain from me. I went to his room but he wasn't there. Then I saw him standing in a middle of a group of children. I approached them and heard: "and I'm leaving next Sunday". The children left and only I remained, frozen, at his side. Haim looked at me and said: "I know you are sad, but I received a scholarship and I am leaving next week. I haven't forgotten that you're looking for your father, and if, by chance, I'll have any new information - I'll write you." (I shouted silently: "Haim, I don't want you to go"!). He stroked my cheek and left.

I feel so awful! Why do I always lose the people I love? I don't understand why they all disappear? Haim was always so nice and affectionate to me. Why does he have to leave?...

I don't know what to do! Maybe I'll turn around his ring three times? Maybe it's a magical ring?... No, it's just an ordinary ring and miracles happen only in books.

Now I have no one to talk to, because Rachel is all mixed up with her boy friend and I feel alone as if there is no one else around me...

Lately I feel I have a big problem because I continually have guilty feelings for betraying my mother. I feel so guilty that I purposely don't get in touch with the other children, for I'm afraid that my black secret will escape me somehow...

I wish we had here a refuge city, like in Biblical time, for people who killed unintentionally. But from whom do I want to run away? No one is chasing me or accusing me. It's I who accuse myself, and from me I want to run away, but even a refuge city won't be able to save me from myself.

Why don't the counselors here understand that I need help? They have to know that if I am suddenly quiet it's because I feel bad. What a pity that my wound is hidden. If it were visible, it would have been treated and cured.

I know that if I'll be able to tell my secret to someone, it won't be so heavy anymore. If I'll reveal it, maybe in the light it won't look so ugly? Maybe it will even shrink? Maybe, in time, it will even fade away? I know that I need help, but I'm too proud to ask for it, and I don't even know from whom!

What luck! Rachel's boy friend went to his uncles for his cousin's wedding, so I went to Rachel and told her I have guilt feelings, though I didn't tell her about what.

She said: "I inform you, Judith, that you have fulfilled your share of guilt for the next hundred years! From now on, take every day seven minutes of guilt feelings before you go to bed. Really, Judith, it's time to put a limit on them; after all, life isn't only a burden, and you aren't a nun that has to carry this cross over her back! It isn't written anywhere that you have to suffer. So enjoy your life and give us a smile. You wouldn't believe how it becomes you..."

I received a letter from my aunt and inside the envelope was a short letter and a marvelous photo of Tyrone Power! I couldn't believe my eyes! I found a big girl who read to me:

"Dear Judy,

I'm glad to fulfill your request and send you a photo of myself.

I wish you all the best,

Tyrone power."

I am in the seventh sky! He is so handsome! I can look at him as much as I want!

I showed his picture to the girls and they were bewildered, they couldn't figure out how come he sent me his photo! I didn't explain, of course, so that they should break their heads!

I already began to think that he won't answer a girl from a far-away country, but he did. On my life he is nice!

I heard older children talk about the horrors that the Nazis did. One girl told about her eight-year-old cousin that two snipers killed his parents before his eyes. The boy screamed at them: "Kill me, too!" But the Nazis laughed and left him alive. Then it dawned on me - the damned Nazi didn't kill me on purpose! He intentionally set me an impossible choice, for he knew, that choosing my mother will be death for me, and choosing my neighbor will be life full with guilt. Now I know that I'll succeed to win out over that Nazi, only if and when I won't feel guilty any more.

The long vacation finally arrived and I went to Haifa for a whole month. My aunt, Ruthi and Zipora were glad to see me, and I was glad to be in my private room again. When I was here in Passover, I met Shuli, who lives on the third floor. He lent me a book of "Hassamba" and today I went to him to return it to him. I met there a very nice and quiet boy called... Itzhak, who looked at me all the time. About an hour later, Shuli came down to me and told me that there is going to be a concert in the evening. The concert is of light classic music, at Mother's Park on Mount Carmel. He asked if I'd like to join him, Itzhak and a girl from their class. I asked my aunt and she agreed because she knows Shuli and his parents for years. In the middle of the park sat a small orchestra that played 'Mid Summer Night Dream'. It was beautiful. We sat on a blanket that Shuli brought. On the grass around us, sat many young couples who embraced and kissed each other like in movies! It was even more fascinating than the music and we all four stared as if hypnotized... When Itzhak saw me to the door he asked if I'll agree to go with him to the concert next week and I agreed.

Yesterday I was twelve years old. Since my aunt doesn't know anything about Judaism, it didn't even occur to her to celebrate my Bat-Mitzvah. She did ask me, though, what I would like for a present. I told her that I want the one thing that is very important to me: to persuade my aunt in England to reveal to me the reason for my father's disappearance - now that I'm twelve and old enough to know it.

My aunt was a little amazed to hear of such a strange request. She promised to write a letter by herself and she also wrote what I dictated:

"Dear Aunt Hilda,

I'm twelve years old and I have a request for my Bat-Mitzvah. I want you to tell me what bothers me a great deal: what exactly happened between my parents? What was the quarrel about and why did my father leave my mother? I want to know the truth, and I'm

old enough to know it. You don't have to be afraid that it will have an effect on me or be difficult for me, for I am certain that I'll overcome the difficulty. By telling me the truth, you'll be giving me the most beautiful present.

I'm waiting impatiently for your quick reply.

Kisses from your niece-

Judy"

Aunt Margaret added that I understand things like a grown-up and it's my aunt's duty as my mother's sister to tell me the truth.

Now I'm certain that she'll do what I asked of her.

The very next day I received a letter from my aunt, and what a wonderful surprise - my aunt had a baby boy!! I never knew she was pregnant! The baby's name is Paul and he is blond with blue eyes, just like his mother. I now have three cousins!

To my aunt's letter was attached a letter from my cousin Harold and a beautiful photo of him and his sister. He wrote:

"Dear Judy,

I heard from Mom that you speak English, so I decided that it's time we write to each other, for you are my only cousin and I'm the oldest cousin you have.

I learn in the fifth grade and am the third best in my class. We learn until four in the afternoon and then I have lots of homework to do; nevertheless, I find time also for my hobbies: playing the organ, singing in a choir and collecting stamps. If you don't collect stamps, you should, for you can learn by them about other countries. Please send me some Israeli stamps and I'll send you English ones.

I'm enclosing a photo of my sister and me and Mom will send you a photo of little Paul.

I'm waiting for your letter.

Your cousin- Harold."

What a handsome boy! He has wavy brown hair and blue eyes. Shila, too, is cute.

How nice that I have three cousins and when I'll grow up I'll visit them all.

Today, as I walked in the street, I saw the public library and went in. Without thinking of it beforehand, I asked the librarian for a book about the Holocaust. She said she couldn't give me because it's a book not suitable for children. I told her that my teacher told me to write an article about the Holocaust. She said she was surprised that a teacher gave a girl my age to write an article about such a horrible subject; in the end she gave in.

I took the book, leafed through it and saw pictures. There were pictures of a pile of shoes, a pile of toys and a pile of naked bodies thrown aside. So that is how it was? My doll Angelica was thrown on one pile and my mother - on the other??!!

I felt faint. I ran outside and sat on the top stair. I felt choked! I must breathe!! A woman who saw me, went quickly inside, came to me with a glass of water and told me to drink.

After I had several swallows of water she sprinkled water on my face. I still felt dizzy. She asked what happened and I answered that it was just weakness and will soon pass. She told me to breathe deeply with an open mouth. I did. How good it is to breath again!! The world stopped spinning around me. I told her I was fine ~~and~~ and I thanked her. She smiled at ^{me} and left.

I felt stronger. What I need is to forget, as if I hadn't seen it and it never happened. At a cinema, on the other side of the street, they are showing a comedy. Exactly what I need! I went home to my aunt and asked for money. Then I went to the film with Zipora and we laughed loudly. Afterwards we bought ice cream.

I can't believe how good it is to live!!!

I lay in bed but couldn't fall asleep. Maybe I'll read until my eyes will close? Yes, I'm beginning to tire... I already skipped a line...

All at once I woke up. I smelled heavy smoke. I jumped out of bed and searched the flat. No, there was no fire and no smoke but I smelled something burning...

Suddenly I heard whimpers: "Mamma"...:Mamushka"...the whimpers grew louder and louder. These are children's voices! I asked: "Who are you?" They said: "We are the children from the pile. You wanted to know about us, didn't you? Well, we came to tell you. We have more than a million stories" ...-"How did you come to me?" -" You opened our book. You invited us." I saw a pile of children staring at me from the hollows of their eyes as if they had never seen a ^{live} girl before. They said: "You smell the smoke, don't you? Well, girl, we are the smoke."

- "That's impossible!"

- "Really?! Tell us, if you are so smart: why did they kill us all?"

- "I don't know..."

- "Think!"

- "Maybe... because you were bad?!..."

- "No. I only pulled the tail's cat..."

- "I only angered my mother..."

- "I only fought with my brother..."

- "We weren't bad, we were children!" A baby that couldn't speak cried and cried.

A boy my age approached me and said:

- "We also want to live! Why only you?"

- "That's right! You should have been here with us, too. How come you were saved when we died?..."

- "If you think it's easy to live, you are badly mistaken. Believe me, I am paying a price..."

- "But we paid the most terrible price of all!" said one big boy.

- "Child, if you helped yourself, help us as well!"

- "But how?? If no one could help you, how can I?!"

- "We thought you cared about us"... they cried.

- "I do care about you! Children, there is one thing you should know: the whole world lost by losing you and I want you to know that from the place you stopped, we carry on. I, your living sister promise, never to forget. A day will come when I'll tell about you. Shalom!"

Shalom!"

- "Goodbye, girl!" - "Remember us!" - "Tell about us!" - "Don't forget!"

They disappeared.

They are gone, but a small part of me is there with them. How terrible that no one saved them : neither their parents, nor God, and to their last breath of air they felt forsaken by all.

I can still see those terrified eyes; those hands stretched forward pleading...

How lucky I was! Those eyes filled with terror- could have been mine, and my tiny shoes could have been there in the pile...

Now all is quiet. I'm sure I'll sleep peacefully.

I went to Nahariya with my aunt to visit her friend. We walked through the beautiful town and then we sat in a coffee shop and had ice cream. I left the two women talking and I walked barefoot collecting seashells along the beach.

Towards evening we returned to Haifa by train. I saw lights in the houses and I thought how happy those windows looked...

A boy, about seven, stood in his yard waving to the train. I waved back at him and he smiled and waved with both his hands. I returned his wave and then we both waved until we couldn't see each other.

Today, as I was walking with Ruthi in Balfour Street, we met a girl she knew. We stopped to talk, the girl asked me who I was, and after a brief probe she said to me: "How lucky you are that you have no brothers! You can't imagine how good you have it! I'm so envious of you that you have no family!" God, I can't believe how crazy this world is! Ruthi told me that the girl has two older brothers who, for three years, didn't talk to their sister! Finally Ruthi convinced them to make peace with her and now they are on better relationship, but not quite.

These quarrels with siblings seem strange to me, since I believed that brothers and sisters always love each other, like they do in the boarding home. I had no idea it could be different. Maybe it's because in a regular family there are parents, and the brothers fight for their parents' attention, while in the boarding home they only have each other.

On second thought, fights with brothers are natural, since in the Bible there are many stories about jealousy and hate between them.

It does seem, though, that it's easier to love brothers when there are no parents around.

Zipora and I behave like pranksters!

In the apartment opposite my aunt's, lives a strange and lonely woman. Zipora and I ring her doorbell and quickly run back into my aunt's apartment. Then we would watch through the keyhole, how the woman became irritated when she found no one at her door. Today she seemed to have been waiting inside her door, because she immediately came out and seized Zipora on the spot! She gave her an angry dressing down in rapid Rumanian, of which we didn't understand a word. However, we got the clear message that she was ready to kill us if we did it again! (She wagged her finger at us, yelling: "Nu, nu, nu!")

We also got a dressing-down from my aunt as well (this time in English).

Now we're sitting wrecking our brains over who our next victim will be.

With Ruthi, it wouldn't even have occurred to me to behave this way because she is a very well-behaved girl; but with impudent Zipora, I know I can be rowdy as much as I please.

I read about a mother that the Nazis threw her three children into a truck in order to take them to the gas-chambers.

The mother cluing to the truck, begging the Nazi to give her back her children. The Nazi told her to choose, because he was willing to return only one child.

The five year old boy begged his mother to choose him, because he was the first born.

The four year old girl begged her mother to choose her, because she was the most beautiful of the three. The three year old girl only cried: "Mommy, me"!!

The mother looked from one to the other but she couldn't choose. She raised her hands and screamed out of her pain. The truck began to move and she clung to it with all her might, but the Nazi drove her away with a kick.

I thought: she couldn't choose because she loved her children equally. Had she chosen one, the other two would have felt betrayed and unloved. She could have tossed a coin, though, and then the two unchosen ones would have understood that it wasn't her choice, but the choice of Fate. They wouldn't have felt so terribly unloved and betrayed.

On the other hand, the chosen child would have lived with terrible guilt feelings, as if he was living at the expense of his two siblings. Maybe that's the reason why the mother couldn't make a choice.

When I had to choose I was very young, but for a mother, it must be a thousand times more difficult.

Today we are at the funeral of Mrs. Green, my aunt's friend, who died yesterday at age sixty seven.

It's my first time in a cemetery. I see how they carry the dead woman on a stretcher and it looks so awful, but even this my mother didn't have.

I see the open mouth of the earth...

I shut my eyes and the pictures I saw in that horrible book come to life: the gaping hole with the pile of naked corps... suddenly one corpse rises slowly, shrouds descend from above to cover her, and in front of my eyes I see my mother's corpse...

Two gravediggers put her gently on the stretcher and very gently put her down into the earth. I hear the "Kaddish" in the ancient language and I say: "Look, Mother, you have the good fortune to be buried in the Holy Land. There no one put a flower on your grave, but here you are covered with many flowers... Now I really believe that you are dead and that you disappeared into the earth.

I won't lie to you, mother. Today is the first time that I mourn you. I want to ask your forgiveness that I never cried over you and always cried about myself. I don't know why it took me so long. Maybe because I didn't really believe that you died?... Before I saw only myself, but now I can see you. Maybe I'm beginning to mature?...

Mother, did it hurt to die? Did you know that your life was coming to an end?... So few years you lived... I hear your voice: "My child, my only hope, through you I live. I am leaving you my will: when the time will come- start your own family." - "I promise. I want also to eulogize you: Here is being buried a Jewish mother, age twenty-nine. A mother, who voicelessly instructed her daughter to choose life. Rest in peace, beloved mother."

Both of us will now find peace- you in the earth and I above it. From now on I'll live my life and enjoy it, come what may. I promise you, a day will come when I'll put a monument for you and not of stone. A monument that will prevent your being forgotten"...

The funeral is over. There is a long line of people and I am the last one to leave. When I reach the gate, I turn back my head, and say: "I know that you are not really buried here, but today I buried you, mother."

My aunt tries always to persuade me to live with her. She says it directly to me and also indirectly through my friends. Zipora tells me that if I'll live in Haifa, I could attain her school, "Hugim", a very prestigious school with excellent teachers. Ruthi tells me, that I could take out a library-card in the public library and join her Scouts.

If in "Tchia" I wasn't ready even to think of the possibility, now I'm ready to consider the proposal. The trouble is that my aunt has no experience raising children and she isn't young. On the other hand, I have here a living space and she can also teach me languages and send me to a first-rate school, and I also have here two good friends and one 'suitor'... On the other hand, in "Kfar-Batya" I have Itzhak, even though he isn't mine; and a week before the holiday, I said I want to learn to play the new piano and I was told I could! I'm weighting the matter and the scales are in balance...

The holiday is over. I said goodbye to everyone and went to the bus station. It was nice meeting the children from the boarding home. This time, when they bragged about their aunts and uncles, I bragged about my aunt who talks English like in movies...

Israel came to me with an unwelcome announcement. He said that before he left for the vacation, he saw the list of assignments for the new-year and I was assigned to the kitchen. Oh, My God! What a let down! There are so many pots and dishes to wash! From the clothing department to the kitchen, is like from the kettle to the fire!

As soon as we entered "Kfar-Batya", I returned the food vouchers and ran to the kitchen with the hope that Israel made a mistake; but no, my name hit the top of the list!

My only consolation is that we'll start to work only after the holidays.

We learnt about King Saul who went to a witch to bring up the spirit of dead Samuel. If there were witches like that then, there is no reason why there couldn't be any now. I shut my eyes tightly and saw... a woman dressed in black stirring a boiling cauldron, which gave off clouds of steam, while she whispered incantations. I said to her: "Raise

up for me the spirit of my dead mother". She ordered: "Lie down on the cold floor!" I obeyed. She continued stirring and whispering: "Rise flame from the cauldron!"

Suddenly... I saw a foggy image rising, and heard a voice as if coming from afar: "My

child, my only one. Why did you call me from the dead?" I cried: "Mamma, is it really you?" -"Yes, my child." -"Mamma, I want to ask you, I must. What was the last word you wanted to tell me when you opened your mouth and no sound came out? Did you want to say: "My child" or: "I love you" or: "Be strong?" My mother said: "I can stay a brief moment. Yes, my child. "Love"...and..."Strong"...and I want you to know that you are not guilty and you always brought me joy, even when you were naughty. Don't think any more of what had happened, live my child, live happily also for me"... She disappeared. I cried: "MAMMA"!!!...

Yes, "Mamma", that was the last word I said, and in that word was everything: "my mother" ... "I love you"...and "forgive me"...

-" Get up and go your way", said the witch. I mumbled: "Thank you" and opened wide my eyes. I heard the teacher say: "and next Wednesday you'll have an exam..."

Today I had a fateful meeting.

I took the bus to Kfar-Sava and beside me sat a girl who asked me to open the window. I couldn't so she helped me and we opened it together. We started talking. I told her I could guess from what country she came from, and she was very surprised that I could. I told her it was no big deal, since I have been living with many children who came from Poland. She also guessed I was a 'child Holocaust' and we told each other a little bit of our history. Then she said: "My whole family perished in the camps, but I have a new family with 99 brothers and sisters and the most charming, adoptive mother. She took us all out of camps and convents and gave us a home and her warm heart. When I have a problem I go to her without hesitation, for I know that she listens to me not only with her ears but also with her heart. I can tell her the most terrible things and she always understands." (I, too, want 'a mother' like that!) I asked her: "Can you give me her address?" -"Sure, why not! Do you want to meet her?" -"Maybe, but I sure want to write to her." We said goodbye but when she got off the bus I shouted after her: "Hey, what's her family name?" She shouted back: "Zilberman- Kichler."

I was both jealous and happy. What a lucky girl! There lives a woman, loving and dedicated, but I didn't have the luck to meet her. Why did she pass over me when she rescued orphans out of convents?... Nevertheless, I was awfully glad of meeting that girl, for I immediately felt close to that woman. I thought: if there is one person to whom I could tell my secret - it would be she. I had the feeling that God sent her to help me. I immediately got off the bus, took the next returning bus back to "Kfar-Batya," went to my room, sat down and wrote:

"Dear Lena Zilberman-Kichler,

You are the only one in the whole world to whom I dare tell my story. and put my deepest secret in your hands. I chose you because you seem to me the one most likely whom I can confide in. If I hadn't missed out, then today you would be my 'mother', too. I feel towards you a strange closeness and I put my trust in you, a thing I don't readily do. I'm very sorry that fate didn't have us meet, for then, today, I wouldn't feel so bad."

I went on and wrote her how I feel bad about what I had done, and how hard it is to live without love, and I asked her to answer me quickly. I wrote her twelve pages and sent them to her without delay.

At long last I felt that I was not alone, that there was now one person out there in the world who shared my secret. I confessed to her like the Christians do, the paper serving as the screen that hides the face; for maybe that's the only way one can really confess.

As I once 'adopted' siblings, I now 'adopted' her as my 'mother' without her knowing it...

"Yom Kippur" fell on the day before yesterday. I decided that now that I was twelve, I'd fast until evening. All day long I was in the synagogue reading from the prayer book but I couldn't think clearly about my sins, for my belly growled from hunger and I thought all the time about food. I kept on praying and in the last prayer before the end of the fast... I heard a heavenly melody, sounds of delicate, sweet, soft strings. The wonderful notes flooded me and lifted me with them. I heard the most beautiful singing, like the singing of angels, and I felt soft and floating, entirely wrapped up with light and love, and I had it so good as I had never had it before. Suddenly I felt a slap and I heard: "She is coming to! Thank God! I already thought she was dead!" One of the counselors lifted me from the floor and carried me in his arms to the infirmary.

I asked: "What happened?" He said: "You fainted; you did a flip-over and bent backwards on the bench and fell to the floor. It was very difficult to wake you, we tried water but it didn't help, so finally I gave you a very hard slap and then you woke up. I'm sorry I smacked you but I had no other choice."

I thought: how strange! Was I on the way to the other world? When I fainted in class once, they woke me up easily and I didn't 'dream' anything. This time it was difficult to wake me and I had a very strange vision. I dream almost every night and sometimes my dreams are strange, but this time it must have been a vision of the world to come, and the music I heard was the most beautiful music I ever heard.

The way to the infirmary was long and the counselor said: "The way is long and you are a little heavy. Can I put you down now?" It was pleasant to be carried in his arms, so I said: "I'm still a little dizzy"... And with his remaining strength he brought me to the infirmary and luckily he didn't faint himself... (I'm horrible, and right after Yom Kippur!)

Then he went back and left me to recover. I'm glad I am alone here and can think quietly without all the 'hoo-haa'. It is strange that I was so sorry and disappointed when he woke me up. But what am I surprised. There happiness was free as air and I didn't have to make an effort to obtain it. I felt like returning home to mother, to know that I was loved completely. It was wonderful to feel so loved and wanted!

Now that I have come to, I'm not sorry, for here it's always interesting and there I'll get anyway. If here I won't reach happiness, I know that in the other world happiness will reach me. Here life is full with activities and searching, but there life is just being.

"God, I know now that you are good and loving and full of light. It comforts me to know that there awaits me happy tranquility, and I'm glad that my mother is in such good hands.

I want to tell you that here in this world there are many interesting things and I don't want to leave yet.

Mother, I know that you're waiting for me, and there I'll never be alone again."

Next day I was the subject of conversation and everywhere I went I heard whispers: "There goes the one, what's her name? The one who fainted"...-"It was difficult to rouse her." -"If she had died on Yom Kippur, she would have been a saint!"

What an entertainment! They make a saint out of me! Now all I lack is the halo...

It's the first time that all the older children pay attention to me. A little devil whispers in my ear: "Maybe you'll start fainting more often?" (I silenced him quickly so as not to be tempted...)

Their excitement amused me, but after all, not every day a girl faints on them and especially on Yom Kippur! I gain a lot out of this fainting: I'm being carried like a princess, I'm turned into the heroine of the day and I'm thought of as the saint of the epoch! I walk proudly like a movie star! I really have to exploit this situation, for who knows when I'll faint again?...

Miriam asked me: "Tell me the truth, how was it?" I said: "Wonderful!" And she almost fainted...

Rachel came to me: "Hey, Judith, what sort of tricks are you playing, ha?" I said: "Do you want to hear a joke? A girl said that I'm almost a saint!"... She laughed: "Judith, you are a confirmed saint! Just don't give me such heart palpitation again, you know I have a weak heart"...she winked at me.

Aunt Margaret called me up to say that I received a thick letter from Aunt ~~Hilda~~ Hilda. I made her promise me not to open it until I'll come for Succoth in a few days.

I'm so excited and tense, I feel a little bit like I did before I received the letter telling me of my mother's death. A pity I didn't ask her about my grandmother, for it's very odd that I never loved her and that I never missed her. It's true she always spanked me, but that in itself doesn't explain my lack of love for her. There was something beyond the spankings... something beyond the words...

I hope my aunt answered all the questions that occupy me: what happened between my parents? Does a man leave the woman he loved because of a quarrel? Maybe he left for another woman? The most important thing is that I'll finally know the truth.

"Yes, Truth, I'm very glad you have finally come, because I missed you. To tell the truth? I'm also a little scared of you, because you are probably hard and cruel. I know they wanted to hide you from me or beautify you in my eyes, but I won't have it, for I want you as you are - natural, straight and true.

I promise, Truth, not to deny you and I sincerely welcome you."

I entered my aunt's apartment and said: "Shalom, read me the letter, please." My aunt said: "Wait a minute, sit down, drink something..." I said: "I can't wait anymore. Please read me now." She read:

"Dear Judy,

Because of little Paul, I didn't answer before. He is very sweet but takes most of my time. I haven't forgotten you and you were in my thoughts a great deal. I decided to answer all your questions. All I'm about to write you I know from a conversation I had with your mother, when I stayed with you in Venice, where you were born, just before the three of you moved to Milan.

As I have already written you, your father was a goldsmith but their economic situation was difficult. They wandered from land to land trying to make a living.

One day he got an expensive ring to be fixed. He told your mother that he wants to seize the opportunity, sell the ring and with the money he'll get, improve the difficult conditions they lived in.

Your mother, who was a woman with high standards of behavior, didn't agree to that. She couldn't accept your father's easy way out. Your father thought he was right and that your mother should be realistic. He told her that it's the only way for them to stay with their

heads above the water, for it was almost impossible to survive. He loved your mother and he wanted to provide her with a better life.

Your mother held on to her integrity. She told him that if he chose that way - she wouldn't live with him any longer. She gave him an ultimatum and he didn't give in and he left.

Here was the real tragedy, for two weeks later, she found out she was two months pregnant. Had she discovered it earlier, maybe she wouldn't have let him go.

Since you wanted to know the whole truth, there is something else you should know: while your parents lived together for four years, they hadn't been formally married, and therefore, you were an out of wedlock child. The truth is that they wanted to get married but they couldn't get the required permits.

Your mother was in very difficult circumstances, for she was left without the man she loved and there was a very heavy pressure on her to abort you. The pressure came from the neighborhood and from your grandmother, who told her daughter, that from every point of view it was crazy to have a child under those conditions.

Your mother was very willful and although she drove your father away, she still loved him and you were their love child and the only remembrance of him. In no way did she ever consider to get rid of you.

Finally your grandmother moved in with your mother in order to take care of you, while your mother sold religious objects from door to door; but your grandmother was against you from the start. I'm writing you this, because from your letters I can see that you never asked about her, and from this I understand that you sensed her rejection and that's why you weren't interested in her.

I know I'm writing you hard things, Judy, but you asked for the truth, and I can see from your letters that you inherited your mother's strong personality, and that's why I fulfill your request.

I'm enclosing a photo of little Paul so that you can see how sweet he is. I'm sure that in a few years, you and Aunt Margaret will come to visit us.

Many kisses from your loving aunt- Hilda."

I felt like a deflated balloon... Now I understand everything: why my father left the house, why I always felt different, and why I didn't love my grandmother.

The letter was a surprise also for Aunt Margaret. She asked me how I felt, and I said that I have to think it over and then I'll talk to her about it. I told her that if any of my friends will call, to say that I'm not at home, because I want to be by myself and I'm not in the mood for entertainment.

"Truth, I feel as if you gave me a punch in my stomach! In spite of it, I'm very glad to know you, for now I know what had happened to me and to my parents, and I learnt more about my mother and about that mysterious man called my father. Yes, Truth, you are mine now and with me you will remain, and I'll respect you even if you will be cruel again. Don't take to heart if they say you are ugly, for in my eyes you are the most beautiful of all, and after life - you are the most important one."

It's hard for me to digest my father's conduct, but I understand that the circumstances made him do what he did, and he weak and couldn't stand in the face of temptation. What would I have done if I were in his place? Would I have behaved like him? I don't think so, but then I'm a girl and not a man who has to provide for his family. I live in Israel and there is no war in the horizon, but then the atmosphere and conditions were different from now. Also in the Bible, all the people, even the most righteous, stumbled at least once...

I'm certain that if he had known of my existence, he would have loved me, because I am his daughter and the daughter of the woman he loved.

It's clear that my mother loved him and didn't want to lose him. On the other hand, her character was that of a 'Yekke', and she sacrificed her happiness (and mine) on the altar of her rigid morality. I am different, maybe because I was born in a country where emotion overwhelms reason. I would have solved the problem in a different way: instead of sending him away, I would have thrown away the ring. It would have frustrated him, but I would have succeeded in keeping the family together.

I told my aunt that I want to go to the beach by myself. I went at half past five in the afternoon. There were only two people on the beach. Beautiful gray clouds were in the sky and a cool breeze was blowing. The waves were high and the seagulls floated above them. It was great to walk barefoot on the sand and hear the cries of the gulls and the waves that broke on the rocks. I watched the setting sun and thought, how my life was like the sea: full of changing moods, surprises, beauty and dangers.

I said: "Now I understand, mother, why in the pictures you have such sorrowful eyes, for although you were happy you had me, you cried at sending him away. Who knows if you didn't regret it, but you couldn't turn the wheel back..."

All this happened so long ago, just the same, it hurts as if it's happening right now.

Aunt Margaret asked: "Do you want to talk to me now about the letter?" I agreed. She said: "Judith, if the revelation that you were born out of wedlock is difficult for you, I want you to know that there were many famous people who were also born out of wedlock. The highly-praised Sarah Bernhardt, for example, was illegitimate and never knew her father." I said: "I understand that I am in a good company... I don't really have any problem with that, especially since my parents loved each other.

As for my grandmother - logically I can understand why she didn't want me to be born, but in my heart I can't understand it, especially since I was her only granddaughter! What surprises and annoys me terribly is that she wasn't ready to accept me even after I was born!"... (This is the thing that was in the air... She always gave me the feeling that I was bad and guilty of something...)

With my aunt's help I wrote:

"Dear Aunt Hilda,

I received your letter and the photo of little Paul. He is very cute and I hope you'll tell me all about him, for I have no idea how a baby grows up.

Thank you very much for telling me the whole truth about my family. Even the most painful truth is a thousand times better than not knowing.

My counselor, Rivka, told me once that you felt guilty for not having me come to stay with you. Maybe it's a good opportunity to tell you that I understand that you couldn't have me because of your economic situation. I want you to know, that things aren't bad for me, and what is important to me is that you wanted. Besides, some poor parents place their children in orphanages, and you have three children of your own and it isn't easy for you.

Please tell Harold I'll write him soon and send him some Israeli stamps.

I want also to ask you how my mother was as a girl. I'm almost certain she was easy to get along with, unlike someone impudent I know...

Once again, dear Aunt Hilda, many thanks for the beautiful present you have given me.

Your loving niece-

Judy"

Today aunt Margaret said: "As for your father, Judith, without understanding the background, it's impossible to understand what he did. But then the times were difficult; one could almost breathe the insecurity in the air. Because of the uncertainty, people were ready to hold on to anything that could give them feeling of safety, which is what your father had done."

I said: "I don't justify him, but I don't blame him. But now I have another problem regarding my father: suppose I'll find him; how can I convince him that he is my father and how to solve the problems that might arise if he, in the meantime, had another family?" My aunt said: "You will need special luck in order to find him. If you do, then we'll solve the problems together."

I liked her attitude and it brought me closer to her than all the presents she could have given me.

If only I could send my father a letter, this is what I would write:

"Shalom father!

I don't know where you are. I can't find you anywhere. I don't know if you are dead or alive. If you are alive, you don't know that you have a daughter. Will the knowledge please you, confuse you, or leave you indifferent? I have no idea. If you are alive, we should meet, don't you think? Who knows, we might even love each other. That's what usually happens between a daughter and a father... We might even find resemblance between us. If you have other children, remember, that I, too, am a part of you. If, by chance, we won't like each other, then we can say: "If that's so, then there is no point in living together and we can just meet occasionally." You see, father, you have an advantage that another parent doesn't have...

Anyway, now it's your turn to find me, for I have almost given up of finding you.

Shalom father, and maybe we'll be seeing each other?

Your daughter- Judith

P.s. Isn't it strange that I miss someone whom I have never even seen?...

My aunt told me today that she has two subscriptions to the philharmonic orchestra and she will take me with her.

That's an additional thing she said to tempt me to stay with her. It's strange that this choice is much more difficult for me than the two previous ones that were so fateful; the first one which was between life and death, the second - between life in a convent and a free life in Israel. Perhaps because I was then too young to fully understand the significance of the choices, while now I am older and can see the consequences of the present choice.

I have always hated it when people were separated from me, then now, how can I part from Itzhak, Rachel and Juda?...

Tomorrow is the last day of the vacation. I told my aunt that I don't yet feel like going back yet and maybe she could call them up and say that I'm not feeling well and I'll return in a few days... To my surprise she called them without a second thought. Well, what did I expect? She wants me to stay with her, doesn't she? I'm so glad I don't yet have to start the kitchen duty!

I just now read a beautiful poem by David Shimoni called: "His Promise he didn't Keep." It's about a boy who rode with his father on the death-train to Auschwitz. The father tried to convince his son to jump off the train and save himself. The son refused to jump by himself, for he wanted his father to jump with him. The elderly father said that if he'll jump he will only hamper his son; but his son was stubborn; then, when the train slowed on the turn, the father said to his son: "Jump, and I'll follow," and pushed his son. The son jumped, but belatedly he realized that his father didn't jump as he had promised, he remained on the train that took him to his death.

The boy who survived, was very angry at his father for lying to him, for his father was an honest man who never lied before.

At first I identified with the boy who believed in his father's honesty and couldn't accept the fact that his father had lied to him. In his mind, truth was the most important thing in life and it's forbidden to lie no matter what the motivation. After I thought a little longer I wanted to say to him: "Don't you understand that your father had to lie to you, that he had no other choice? He had tried to reason with you and convince you that if he'll join you, you'll both be caught, but if you'll jump by yourself, you have a good chance to survive for you are young and agile. When he saw that you kept on refusing, he said to himself: "To hell with the truth! Life is what is important!"

That's why he lied to you. He didn't do a bad thing as you mistakenly thought. On the contrary, he did the most noble and good thing in the world. He loved you so much, that he was even willing to lie to you in order to save you!"

Then I thought of my mother on that fateful day, and I understood that my mother wanted to save me at any cost. She knew me better than I knew myself. She knew how attached to her I was; if she had asked me beforehand not to choose her, I wouldn't have listened to her. But if she would anger me and reject me, there is a chance I won't choose her and be saved. That's why she purposely didn't answer my questions and treated me like a baby that doesn't understand anything. She also made out as if she was a stranger, put on a whiteface 'mask', and her eyes, that were always so loving, became unfamiliar and distant. They had a look that said: "I don't know you and you don't know me. Don't choose me! Choose another mother!" I reacted to her distance and admonition. I didn't understand, but I did what my mother wanted me to do. (I know, mother, that to give up a child, even when the purpose is sacred, is the most difficult thing on earth...)

My mother 'lied' to me out of love. Her silences, her distance, were a lie, and through her lie—I saw the truth. Only today I can see what a horrible situation it was, that my mother, symbol of life, could be the cause of my death; whereas the gentile stranger woman, became, then, the means of my survival. Only a mother knows how to save her daughter with a look, a look that appears unloving...

My mother achieved her goal, but how I would later feel, she couldn't think of. She was prepared that we separate in anger, rather that I'll follow her on her last journey. She didn't take into account the guilt feelings I will have for being angry at her and for not choosing her. Or she might have decided that this is the price I have to pay for my life, and even though it's a heavy price, it's worth it.

"Yes, mother, I understand what happened, but I'm sad ever since, because I miss you and the happy Judith that somehow had gone with you. I only tell you in secret what the others don't know, that when you cry inside, on the outside it doesn't show.

You can't imagine, mother, how hard it is to be all the time 'a half', in a world of 'wholes'...

"I know, Mamma, that you couldn't answer my questions then, but if you could have, if you hadn't been paralyzed by fear and if you had then the time to write, I'm sure you would have left me a farewell letter and written me something like this:

"My beloved daughter,

I'm forced to part from you. I'm sorry I'm holding myself back from you, but I have no other choice. I'm doing this so that you won't choose me, but choose the Christian neighbor instead.

I love you more than life itself, and that's why I'm prepared that you will be angry with me, just that you should live. When you'll grow up, you'll understand. If you won't understand then, you'll understand when you will be a mother.

I know you'll have a very difficult life, for you'll be alone and I won't be at your side, nor will anyone else. I know it's terrible to be left without a family, lonely, vulnerable, unloved, and without any back-up to rely on.

I don't even know how to prepare you for the road ahead. I just hope that the love I gave you, will be the basis on which, in the future, you'll be able to build your life on. I hope very much that one day you'll convey my love to the grandchildren I'll never know.

You have courage and determination, and I'm certain that with their help you'll succeed.

Be brave, my child, and always look ahead with hope.

I love you-

Mamma."

'If I could, Mamma, I would have sent you a telegram:

I love you the most in the world and I understand.

Judithline."

I woke up with a very strange feeling. I have been thinking of something so monstrous, that I can't believe it can be true. I reject the thought, but it continuous to come back.

This morning when I woke up, I knew, yes, it could be true!

The thought that sticks in my head is this: is it possible, that the Christian neighbor is the one that turned us in to the Nazis?! It would be so inhuman, but the things that seem the least probable, turn out to be true.

The assumption that the Christian neighbor is the one, is so horrible, that even now, when I'm writing it, I can't believe it. I related to her as a member of the family and her daughter, Clara, was my best friend! Could it be that she is the one?... If so, then she didn't go there to help, she went there to collect the reward!!

But... it could also be that I am wrong.

Rachel called me from "Kfar-Batya" to tell me that she got two days of vacation to visit her aunt and uncle in Kiryat-Haim, but before that she wants to come and spend a few hours with me in Haifa. I said: "Welcome!" Before she hung up, she said that she has a surprise for me. (Only Rachel is capable of being so cruel by not telling me right away!) The next day morning we met near the Technion, not far from my house. We embraced as if we hadn't seen each other for years. We went to a coffee house near by and she ordered a cake for us. We engaged in a small talk, but every few minutes I asked what was the surprise. Rachel said: "You know, you are a little girl but a big nuisance!" I said: "If you say so... but what is the surprise?" Finally she gave in and handed me a thick envelope - the letter from Lena Zilberman-Kichler!! I jumped on her with joy! I asked her to come to my house, but she said that her relatives are waiting and she'll come another time and then we would go to the movies or to the pool. I accompanied her to the bus, and then I flew home to read the letter. This is what Lena wrote:

"Dear Judith,

I was very surprised and pleased to receive your letter. Although I didn't answer you until today, because I was busy, you were most of the time on my mind. Now I'm finally free to relate to all the important subjects you raised in your letter.

I'm sorry you feel that it was a lost opportunity, that it wasn't I who took you out of the convent. My circumstances were such, that they kept me from coming to Italy. Now that we established a contact by correspondence, we can continue it as long as you like.

Before I'll answer you I would like to tell you, Judith, that your story touched me deeply. I thank you for your trust in me by placing your deepest secret in my hands. I must tell you that your observations are mature for your age and you have the ability to understand your inner experiences. At the same time, there are processes that I could explain to you, things that I know, both as a psychologist and as a woman with much experience with Holocaust children.

What shall I begin with? Perhaps with what is the most difficult for you—your guilt feelings. You accuse yourself for not choosing your mother, for not saving her and for being alive instead of her. You are badly mistaken. You did not betray your mother. On the contrary, you were true to her wish not to choose her but to choose the neighbor. You did the right, clever, and good thing for her and for you. You didn't disappoint her. You did exactly what she expected you to do. Although you were so young, you sensed the danger and you made the right decision. You had a strong, deep bond with your mother. She apparently knew what was going to happen. Because she knew, you knew it, too, for you read it in her eyes. She conveyed you a message that she couldn't express in words. In her mute way, she instructed you not to choose her but to choose life. There was between you a non-verbal communication, and you caught the hidden message she passed on to you in her eyes and behavior. You wrote: "Her eyes distanced me from her as if by force, and against my will I was compelled to make a choice that pressed on my conscience."

You were a little girl that had to make a terrible choice, and you had no other way but to choose as you did. Had you been in her place, you would have done exactly the same thing in to save your little girl.

You blame yourself for not having saved her, and you convinced yourself that it was all your fault. Everything that happened didn't depend on either of you. You didn't have the power, nor did anyone else, to change even one little thing of what happened. There was nothing you could do to save your mother; neither would pleading have helped.

As if it hadn't been enough that such a disaster fell on you, you punished and beat yourself. What a pity that you were overwhelmed by guilt feelings for such a long time. The time has come for you to close your account with the past and discard these guilt feelings once and for all.

You wrote that you felt responsible for your mother's death and that you didn't accompany her to death. You have to know, that a child doesn't take responsibility for a parent, it's the other way around. Your only responsibility was to receive the last message from your mother, to choose the neighbor. I want you to know that nothing you had thought, or did, brought on you the horrible disaster. Even if you had been a 'bad' girl, even if you had 'forbidden thoughts', it had, of course, no bearing on the tragic events. They had no connection to either your thoughts or wishes. Even if you had been a perfectly good girl, the Nazis would have taken your mother and grandmother, the way they took millions of Jews to their destruction.

You related everything that happened to yourself. This is called 'a magical thought', characteristic for small children. It's also typical for survivors, to feel guilt and responsibility, even when there is no basis for them in reality. (But the anger and fury one feels- is more than justified!)

Your mother's one and only purpose was to rescue you, and in this she succeeded. Would you have helped her by joining her?... The knowledge that you were saved from destruction, was her only consolation

The past, Judith, doesn't exist any more, except within you. Put it elsewhere, somewhere in the back, and remember, that each day you live, distances you from that awful day.

Today everything has changed. You are not in the same place and in the same position. You are not a small, lost, little girl any more. Ask yourself what your mother would have liked for you. She surely wouldn't have wanted that you should abstain from happiness and love, for then you would be throwing away the wonderful gift of life that she gave you.

Fulfill your mother's last wish and love yourself, for you are worthy of love. I'm telling you now what your mother would have told you if she were alive: "You are a good girl, you didn't do anything bad. Live, my child, in happiness and love."

I believe in you, you'll succeed. Enjoy your life. I'm convinced you'll derive the sweet from the bitter.

I'll be always at your disposal to listen, to advice, to guide, and if you like - to meet.

God bless you!

Lena zilberman-kichler."

What a wonderful woman! She is like a fairy, that with her magic wand changed me from feeling bad about myself to feeling good, from feeling treacherous to feeling loyal. I prefer a letter to a meeting, because when you talk the words pass by and can't be caught in their flight, but when you write, the words remain trapped on paper.

I feel tremendous relieved that there is someone in this world who knows my secret, which makes it less burdensome. Who knows, maybe if I'll share it with more people it will continue to lessen until it will finally disappear?...

I sat down and wrote:

"Dear Lena,

Your letter touched me deeply. It showed me that you care about me. I always dreamt that one day someone will come, stretch out a hand to me and say: "Shalom. I'll be your friend. Don't worry any more."

You are a friend that holds my hand and doesn't let go. I feel that you accept, understand and support me. The knowledge that somewhere in the world there is a good woman like you, warms my heart. Now I feel released, whereas before I felt a prisoner of my secret. Because of you I am freed!

You know what, Lena? Life of pleasure without guilt will be my revenge over that Nazi! Dear Lena, I want you to know that you are no longer a mother to a hundred children, but a mother to a hundred and one.

Yours with joy and many thanks-

Judith "

Last night I dreamt that I was leafing through an album. One of the pictures I saw was of small children sitting in two rows. All the children sat staring straight ahead, except for one little girl in the first row who sat with her back to the camera. I thought, what a strange girl! Suddenly the picture took on depth, became three dimensional and turned real! I approached the little girl and said: "Why are you turned around? Face the camera!" She shrugged her shoulders in refusal, got up and started to run.

I ran after her shouting: "Hey, girl, stop! Why are you running from me? I won't do you any harm!" but she kept on running. Finally, when I was almost out of breath, I caught her. I held her shoulders, turned her around, and my breath stopped - she was me!!! The little girl smiled at me sweetly. I told her in wonderment: "Yu, do you know that you are awfully sweet?..." She looked at me with her big eyes wide open and smiled.

At that instant I woke up. I had strong heartbeats from joy and excitement, for I knew what the little girl told me in her smile: I'm not a bad girl, I'm good and sweet and so are you!

I can't believe how relieved and free I felt! I went out on the veranda. I stood barefoot, spread my arms to the sides and swirled around. The whole world swirled with me. What a wonderful feeling! I'm a little girl again! I float in space, weightless, like a feather. I'm light and airy..."Hey, world, I love you! I'm part of you! I feel like embracing you, or at least myself! How good it is to float like this! How good to feel this happiness in me! Nothing distresses me any more!"

I returned to my bed. The room still swirled around me. I must calm down but I can't, I feel like a drunkard! I'm capable of loving the little girl, "Hey, I'm capable of loving me!" Deep inside I'm not alone any more, for I have a good friend-me!!!

I feel that the past no longer can press his long hand on me. He hasn't faded completely, but he is withdrawing... Until today I never saw the future, but today I see. I smile at it and, wonder of wonders, it smiles brightly at me!

"At long last, damned Nazi, I conquered you! Now I'm out of your reach, and it's both my victory and my revenge"!!!

I hate to return to "Kfar-Batya." Each time I return from vacation, I feel oppression. When I reached the gate of "Kfar-Batya", I saw counselor Batya, 'the witch', standing at the gate. She immediately asked:

"Where are your food-vouchers?" (Oh, my God! I left them on the table...)

"I forgot them at my aunt's and they were punched anyway."

"I explicitly said to bring them back, even if they are punched, for without them you can't get new ones. You'll have to go back to your aunt and bring them."

"You want me to return to Haifa now?!"

"Yes, now! Without them you can't get food."

"Then today I won't eat, and tomorrow morning I'll go back and bring them."

"No. You won't go tomorrow morning. You'll go now!"

"Do you want me to go back by myself in the dark?!"

"For my part, you can go back in the middle of the night! You won't get in without the vouchers!"

"If I have to go back to Haifa now - I'm leaving for good!"

"Then don't come back!"

"That's it!! This is the last straw!"

I was boiling with anger. This is the limit! What does she think, the damned one, that she is standing at the gate to paradise like the angel with the reversing sword?!...

I sat the whole trip with clenched fists, and with all my might, I kept myself from crying.

It was eleven at night when I reached my aunt. She was just going to bed, and was astonished to see me at her door, saying: "I have decided to live with you." She looked at me in disbelief and asked what had happened. I told her. She said: "How thoughtless of them! Never mind, Judith, I'm sure it's all for the best. Tomorrow morning we'll go to school to register you, and then we'll go back to "Kfar-Batya" to tell the principal that you are leaving and take your belongings."

In the morning we went to the school principal. She asked me what I learnt in Raanana. She said that I'll have to complete some material, but she doesn't anticipate any problem, since she can see that I'm intelligent. She told me to take the list of books from Zipora and I can start school tomorrow.

I'll ask Zipora not to tell the kids that I'm an orphan, for I don't want to feel different.

Anyway, the children here don't even know that there are, in Israel, children like me.

From now on, 'Judith the Holocaust Child' will go underground. In her place will appear

'Judith the Sabre', a girl with many thorns and with an inner softness that no one will know of. From the outside I want to be like them, but from the inside I'll always remain myself.

At noon we rode to "Kfar-Batya". We went to the principal and I told him I was leaving. He didn't ask any questions at all. Neither, what happened, nor, why does such a young girl leave the boarding home years before she has to. He didn't even try to persuade me to stay. Either he is indifferent, or he didn't want to hear my reasons. Finally he said: "In a few months we'll send you a counselor; if you will still be of the same opinion, then it will be final." (It's already final!)

I took the few clothes I had, and, to all the children I saw, I handed out candies that I had brought. They all looked confused by my departure, for no other girl had left so suddenly and at such a young age.

I cast a glance around the place and took my leave in my heart from all the children from "Tchia" who were an inseparable part of my life, especially from mischievous, charming Rachel, and from Juda the Italian who always stood up for me, and, of course, from Itzhak. "Goodbye, Itzhak, with the handsome looks and the beautiful smile. It seems that we weren't meant for each other, after all, but I'll always remember you as a beautiful dream of my childhood"...

I close here an important chapter of my life and leave my past behind me. In life there are always new beginnings and this is my opportunity to begin my life anew.

I know that I'm going out on a difficult road, for I'm alone and different and I'll have to pave my way by my own efforts. I step forward with raised head and a smile and look courageously ahead, and no one will know when I'll feel sad.

"Mother, I'm a big girl now, and I know you aren't on any star; but I feel sure that when I'll die, our souls will meet, and we will be together again as at the beginning"...

This is the end of the journey, little girl. Now the time has come to say farewell to you. I know you since you were very small, Judith. I know that you were alone and sad, that no one hugged you or told you words of love. So now I give you all the hugs and kisses that you never got, and I say to you openly that I love you. I want you to remember, little girl, that you are not alone any more. When I look at you from here, you seem so far away... an abyss separates us... but my little daughter is the bridge to you, little one.

Yours with love-

Big Judith
Feb-1986

Dedicated to the memory of my mother: Anna Haselnuss

DICTIONARY

Mamma-----	Mother
Nonna-----	Grandmother
Boun giorno-----	good day/ good morning
Bouna notte-----	good night
Grazie-----	thank you
Arrivederci-----	see you again/ So long
Un poco-----	a little
Ciao-----	Hi/ goodbye
Bambina-----	a girl
Bambola-----	a doll
Uno, due, tre-----	one, two, three
Banda-----	a gang
Madre-----	Mother Superior
Bene-----	good
Gloria-----	Glory
Corraggio-----	courage
Paura-----	fear
Dolce-----	sweet
Terra Santa-----	Holy Land
Signorina-----	a young lady
Viva-----	Hurray
Pace-----	Peace
Pace Finalmente-----	Peace at last
La Guerra e Finita-----	The war ended
Dottore-----	Doctor
Poverina!-----	Poor one!
Buona Fortuna!-----	Good Luck!
Buon Viaggio!-----	Have a nice trip!
Cara bambina-----	Dear girl
<i>Giardino pubblico</i>	<i>public garden</i>
<i>capitano</i>	<i>captain</i>
<i>Ti amo</i>	<i>I love you</i>

